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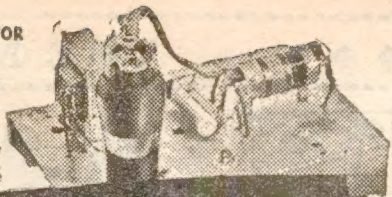

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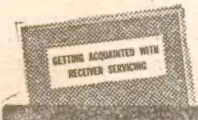

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Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 112, No. 4 for Best of New Stories

February, 1945

NOVELETTES

Cheechako Pilot..... R. G. EMERY 10

McQueen was tough enough—anyone who'd seen him sock the big lieutenant at the Mile Post bar would testify to that—but it took more than beating up the army to make a man a sourdough in Alaska. "We can spot a cheechako as far as we can smell him," was how Aasie Rogness put it and if the way the Fairbanks natives failed to be impressed by McQueen was any indication he must have exuded a very fresh aroma indeed. All of which didn't disturb him any. He had some killing to do and the more people he could get to hate him in a hurry the quicker the dead, he figured.

Pistols with Coffee..... WILLIAM DU BOIS 68

"I'll make a soldier of you if I die trying," Brevet-Captain Carter told Roger Pinckney, that arrogant young fire-eater who'd fought more duels than he could remember and shot a man for each of the twenty years of his life. "We aren't conducting this war with the Seminoles according to the code duello, so the first thing you'll have to acquire, Pinky, are brains enough to be afraid."

SHORT STORIES

Benjamin Franklin and the Fourteenth Virtue..... CLIFFORD KNIGHT 48

Cherokee Red, the itinerant printer, tried to follow in Ben Franklin's footsteps and practice each of the great sage's thirteen virtues in regular rotation, a week at a time, thirteen times a year. It worked fine till he hit Queen City, Kansas on July 47th and had to add a new maxim to his list—*If you want a thing done well do it yourself, chicken stealing included.*

No Job for a Lady..... RAY MILLHOLLAND 58

Perhaps it was just as well there was no seafaring tradition in Lieutenant Maclaren's background to spoil his blissful unawareness of what invariably happens to an unchristened ship. If he'd known what to expect when no beautiful girl with an armful of roses dunked the bow of his USS SC F-99 with champagne he might have hesitated to engage a Jap flat-top and three destroyers with nothing but four broken-down PT boats to support him.

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BE OUT ON FEBRUARY 9TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Badger's Gold.....GORDON CLEAL 88

People toss friendship around pretty recklessly but to a dog, it's something to live and die for. Which explains Badger's interest in the Reif ranch—after all, he'd paid for the spread—and his two-footed partner's pleasure that the old dog approved of the investment.

The Pink Caterpillar (an off-the-trail story).....ANTHONY BOUCHER 131

If a South Pacific *tualala* or medicine man gave you a *carte blanche* on the future—permitted you to go forward in time a hundred years and return to the present with any single item you desired—what would you choose? Some still-to-be-invented gadget? The yet unwritten best-seller for 1999? Better select carefully—and remember there's always a catch to magic!

THE SERIAL

Roger Sudden (3rd of 5 parts).....THOMAS H. RADDALL 98

Torn from the scant protection of the Halifax soldiery, young Sudden wakes to find himself a prisoner of the bloodthirsty Micmacs, slated for torture by the women of the tribe. And not even that fabulous emissary of God and the Devil, the mad Abbé Le Loutre, will intervene for he knows well that squaws have no souls.

FACT STORIES

Cattle in the Clouds.....DAN L. THRAPP 86

The Texas longhorns and the cowboys who drove them were a rugged lot, but the Chaco herds and gauchos who prod them across the Andean peaks from Argentina to Chile two or three times a week don't exactly hoof it in luxury either.

America's First One-Man Army.....JOHN RICHARD YOUNG 96

He never heard of a machine gun or a dive-bomber but this Eighteenth Century paragon of warriors set the precedent for the Captain Werners and Commando Kellys of today. Meet Peter Francisco, the only man in our army's history to put to flight two whole regiments of cavalry single-handed.

VERSE

Tank Party.....R. B. MOLLOY 67

When there's room for God plus five,
Suicides go home alive!

American Ships.....BERTON BRALEY 95

We have kept 'em sailing wherever the lightnings of war were hurled,
And we'll sail 'em still, with the old flag flailing
In all the winds of the peacetime world!

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire.....Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6

Ask Adventure.....Information you can't get elsewhere 136

Ask Adventure Experts.....The men who furnish it 137

Lost Trails.....Where old paths cross 146

The Trail Ahead.....News of next month's issue 139

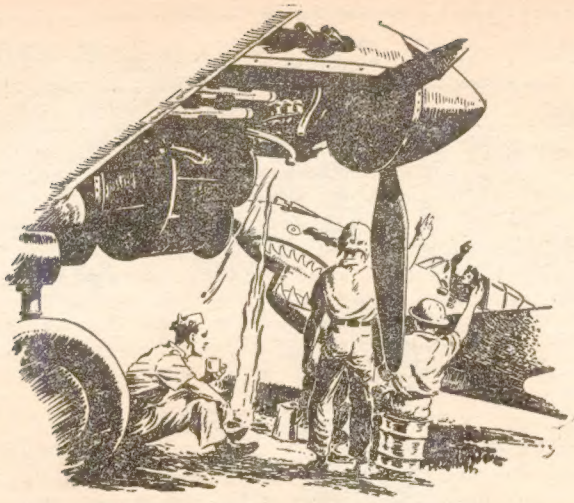
Cover painted for Adventure by Maurice Bower

Kenneth S. White, Editor

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

—The Publishers.



THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

SEVERAL additions to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade to introduce this month. We'll let Col. R. G. Emery, USA, who gives us "Cheechako Pilot" on page 10, have the floor first. He writes—

The first time that a magazine asked me for a brief personal review, I remember having to sift a considerable mass of material in order to reduce the thing to a compact thousand or so words. Now, even after another eight reasonably active years, the mass seems to have shrunk to a rather embarrassing mote.

There was, however, one thing about that first effusion. It was accompanied by a photograph presenting indisputable objective evidence that I had a bull-dog who could climb palm trees. That, and the fact that, a year ago or so in Montana, I taught a yearling coyote to find and flush pheasant (no snapshots extant) are about my most notable accomplishments to date. The most measurable, at least.

I have also been a practicing infantryman since I was seventeen—a matter of a little more than eighteen years. A look around this world, which the solid characters with gravel under their toe-nails and steel in their souls have lately untangled for us, makes me feel that membership in that fraternity is accomplishment enough.

Specifically, I fought the first round of the war in Alaska and the western Aleutians. I have just heard the bell for the second, but the neighborhood is one of those things the War Department would prefer undiscussed.

We'll try to get the colonel (we forgot to mention that he's a West Pointer) to unlimber after the bell rings terminating that second round (the knockout one in the big fracas, we hope) and fill in a few of the biographical gaps. After all, these *Camp-Fire* communiqués don't have to be as succinct as a military memo.

GORDON CLEAL, who mined "Badger's Gold" on page 88, (and a very nice vein he struck, too) remarks, stepping up to the blaze for the first time—

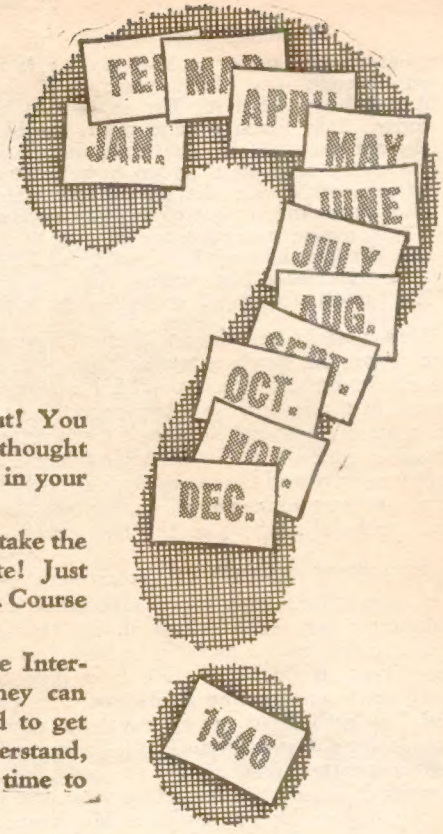
As most of my ideas became fixed in a cow country where personal biographies are usually kept in mothballs, I found the following a bit difficult to write. It would be useless for me to try to promote the notion that I am a high-horned Jasper, with a hard hat hanging on a plush-covered family tree, because folks I know, who read *Adventure,* would write in and tell you that I'm a thin guy with a hatchet face, who collects friends and likes bannock, beans and coffee, behind a smudge fire, out in the open.

My childhood days were divided between the States, Scotland and eastern Canada. The Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph made a conscientious effort to complete my education, but my father wasn't particularly pleased with the result.

I have always enjoyed getting around, and the Calgary country of Alberta and British Colombia have provided me with lots of room and a variety of work. I know

(Continued on page 8)

what will YOU be doing one year from TODAY



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(Continued from page 8)

what it's like to try to keep right side up on a bronck—yes, I know you spell it 'cho'. And I know what it's like to drop a big cedar. They reach up and touch the blue sky out here in B. C. And then, there's the graveyard shift in a hydro power house. After a while you don't mind the noise. That skims the surface of what I see when I light a pipe and poke my feet up to the fire. People, horses, dogs and kids; I like them all and I like writing about them. It's fun—that's why I do it.

Never one to interfere with another man's fun when the guy's a writer and confesses he enjoys batting the keys of his typewriter (most of the authors we know would rather do almost anything but write) we've hastened a wire off to B. C. urging Mr. Cleal to hurry up and have himself a hell of a time—at our expense, if it pans out to be as successful a binge as the last one.

ANTHONY BOUCHER, who sees pink caterpillars instead of elephants after hoisting a few in The Top of the Mark, is a native son who was born in Oakland and now lives in Berkeley. He is a detective story critic on the San Francisco *Chronicle* and has published seven mystery novels, two under the pen name H. H. Holmes, and has appeared frequently in anthologies. Fergus O'Breen, the detective who appears in the story which introduces Mr. Boucher to *Adventure* this month, has also been the leading character in three of the author's novels. Besides collecting pipes, steins and Sherlock Holmesiana Mr. Boucher is also bent on accumulating a library of Latin-American detective stories. Such are scarce items, he reports, and he'd be grateful to any reader who can steer him to any who-dunit writers in Spanish.

DAN L. THRAPP, whose brief article in tribute to the toughness of the Andean cattle and cattlemen will probably arouse the ire of innumerable Texans—we can hear the beefs begin already (pun intended)—writes to introduce himself at the fire—

I'm 31 and at present a second lieutenant in the QMS, AUS, and as restless as only a second lieutenant who has been stationed in this country for 18 months can be. However, that soon may be changed.

Born in Illinois, not far from Chicago. The Great Depression caught me at the end of my first year of college (that was at the University of Wisconsin) and I spent five years knocking about this country, Canada, and Mexico, mostly by freight. During this period I worked for two years for the American Museum of Natural History at New York in the department of vertebrate paleontology. Was sent west with a joint museum-Sinclair dinosaur expedition in the summer of 1934, and dug fossils in Wyoming for some months.

At the end of that period I bought a couple of horses at Greenriver, Utah, and during the winter of 1934-5 worked my way down the east side of the Green and Colorado rivers to the junction of the Colorado and San Juan. So far as I know it is the only time that particular trip has ever been done. It was a lot of fun, but my next trip down through that country will be by boat.

In the fall of 1935 I went back to college (this time to the University of Illinois) and the next year transferred to Missouri where they have a good journalism school, and was duly graduated in the summer of 1938.

In February, 1939, I went to work for the United Press at Chicago; was everything from police reporter to sports writer. They transferred me to New York in the summer of 1940 and to Buenos Aires, Argentina the fall of that year.

It was while I was working for UP down there that I got a vacation and used it to see the Andes, incidentally, climbing a couple of mountains and running across the cattle drives I wrote about in the article.

The war came along and an AP man and I decided to come home cross-country. We bought three mules in northern Argentina and rode them to La Paz, Bolivia. Took a short sight-seeing trip to Cuzco and the Inca country to the north, then crossed Peru by railroad, truck and other unlikely means, and caught a Chilean boat at Callao for New Orleans and the Army. For reasons best known to it, the Army decided I was better fitted for the Quartermaster Corps than anything else, and I haven't been able to show them the error of their ways yet, though I'm still working on it.

SOME of the most vigorously effective verse we have seen on war themes lately has come from women writers. "Tank Party" on page 67 is an example. R. B. Molloy who wrote it is Ruth Branning Molloy, a Philadelphia newspaper woman. The lady confesses she's never been inside a tank in her life but a lieutenant friend of ours in the Armored Force whom we asked to read the lines asserts they couldn't have been written by anyone but a veteran of the General Shermans.

HERE'S the kind of letter we don't see often enough. It gives us that prod we need every so often to keep us on our editorial toes—even if its component parts don't add up to quite the perfect sum—or should we say imperfect?—that the writer intended.

(Continued on page 140)

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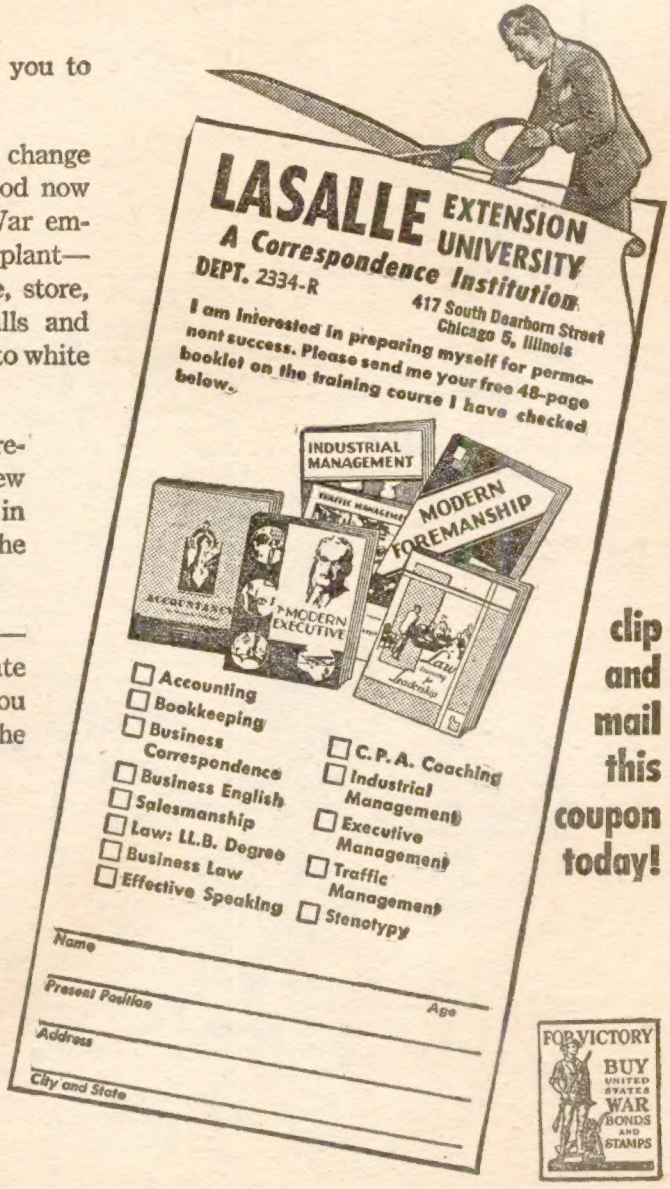

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CHEECHAKO PILOT

A Novelette of Alaska

By

R. G. EMERY

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

McQUEEN hit the big lieutenant before he thought. If he had taken time to think, he might never have hit him at all. He might have decided against it. Or, given any warning, the lieutenant might not have been such an easy target.

He took a lot of hitting, as it was. McQueen's straight right, with a hundred and ninety pounds behind it, only rocked him. But it also dulled his reflexes and he teetered on his heels for a moment, his hands down and his eyes wide in vacuous surprise.

Good or bad, it wouldn't help to leave the job half-done. So McQueen hooked his left, pivoting and lifting as he struck. The lieutenant's shoulders met the floor first and he slid a dozen feet across its polished surface.

McQueen turned back to the blond girl in the spotted parka. He said, "Now let's have that drink."

McQueen supervised the loading. Those monkeys might not be Japs, but they were damn peculiar Indians.

She said, "You're not through yet." She didn't seem shocked or displeased that she had just seen her boy-friend knocked halfway back to Seattle. Just interested.

McQueen looked over his shoulder. Two other uniforms were lifting the lieutenant to his feet and arguing with him. He was still groggy and they were winning the point, pulling him with them back to his table. One of them, a slender, gray-eyed captain, glanced once at McQueen. He felt a tightness in his throat at that level, promising gaze. Undoubtedly, he wasn't through, as far as the Army was concerned. But they weren't doing anything about it tonight.

The girl said, "I didn't mean the Army. They'll let Riggsy look you up when he's sober. I mean this."

A short, heavy man was coming down the bar. He was nearly as wide as he was tall, and he wasn't too short. His clothes were good and they fit him well. The boss. The orchestra, at the far end of the room, stopped and everybody in the place was listening.

The fat man's face was placid. He said, "I'm going to buy you a taxi to town, mister."

McQueen said, "I buy my own taxis. First, I'm going to have a drink."

"Not here." His eyes flicked to the blonde and back again. "You can take the girl with you."

"I'm sorry I slugged your soldier boy. He should have kept his mouth shut."

"The girl came out with him, mister."

McQueen shrugged. "Her business. None of yours."

The other's voice was still even, almost patient. "It's my business to see that there's no more trouble. That's all. Now, I'm seein' to it. Will you take a taxi?"

"I'll take a drink. Don't blame me for your trouble. It's my business, too, when I put their damned uniform on. Maybe I'll do it before I have to and maybe not."

THE wide man made a motion and the bartender put whiskey in a glass and pushed it across the bar. The man said, "Have your drink. It's on me. Let me give you a word with it. You're a handy fella, friend. You showed us. But you're in Alaska, friend. We've got a lot of handy fellas. We're used to 'em. We don't mind and we don't scare."

"You've also got a lot who talk too much."

"Not me, friend. I go to put you in that taxi, I'll have help. So let's be goin' easy."

The blonde took McQueen's arm. "Come on. I think they've got one more big mouth in Alaska. Anyway, I'm tired of this roadhouse. Let's go find another."

McQueen pulled away and looked up and down the silent line along the bar. His long, sharp-cut face was black. He said coldly, "From all I can see, there's plenty of you could qualify for a soldier suit. Any of you anything to say about why I'm still wearing my own?"

The wide man took his other arm, above the elbow. A sudden grin split his face but McQueen felt power turn him toward the door. The man said, "I've seen 'em walking stiff-legged up and down this bar for years, but damned if your back hair ain't standing higher than I've ever seen before. You go wreck some other joint."

McQueen and the girl stood outside in the soggy spring snow. The May air was crisp and clean. McQueen dragged a breath of it deep in his lungs. It helped to wash away something more than stale cigarette smoke.

Inside, the orchestra—all three pieces—hit it hard in relief. McQueen turned and looked back at the square log walls of the roadhouse. There was nobody in sight except a bandy-legged native in a greasy checked shirt, who came around the corner to peer owlishly at them and then go away again.

McQueen laughed shortly. "Who was the stubby guy?"

"Morse Mixon. He owns it."

"I gathered. Husky lug."

"He is." The girl's tone was meaningful. "He's rough, too. You were lucky."

McQueen turned on her. "Now, look. . . ."

She patted his arm. "Now, baby. I know you're a big, bad man. But you don't scare me, either. All I meant was, Morse isn't usually so good-natured. He liked you, for some reason."

"That makes me lucky, eh?"

"It saved you a bloody nose. And we'd still have wound up outside. Think of me."

"I'm thinking."

"Well, I live in this town. And here you've got me thrown out of the Mile Post. That sounds terrible."

McQueen said, "You didn't have to come. Why didn't you stay with the Army?"

She laughed. "I'd have been popular, after you slugged Riggsy. What made you so mad? What he said?"

"I didn't like his face. Let's take the damned taxi. Where to?"

"I think we'd better go back to town. We can go to the Tavern. If you pick any more fights, I can walk home from there."

It was four miles to town. The taxi lurched over the high-crowned, icy gravel. A curve threw the girl against him. The car straightened out but she stayed there.

McQueen's arm tightened about her, lifting her toward him. Her head tilted back and she looked up, smiling. McQueen kissed her. Her lips were cool and generous. The body under the parka was alive and vibrant.

McQueen said, "I've got a room at the Northland. Let's skip the Tavern."

She pulled away and moved across the seat. "No, thanks," she told him coolly.

"Why not?"

"Not because I'm insulted. We're not even friends, for one thing."

"All right. Let's get acquainted. I'm Jerry Mason. Who are you?"

"It's about time you asked me. Aasie Rogness."

"A-a—? What was that?"

"Aasie. It's Norske. Norwegian."

"And you live in Fairbanks?"

She shrugged. "For about a year. Long enough. And you—did you come today? Or yesterday?"

HE LAUGHED. "Do I look so new?" He looked down at the scuffed sleeve of his leather jacket a little ruefully.

"Your clothes haven't anything to do with it. Don't think you can fool anybody about being a cheechako. We can tell one as far as we can smell him."

"What was that? Cheechako?"

"Somebody new in Alaska. Opposite of sourdough."

"I'm that, all right. What else do you want to know? Or are we friends now?"

"None of those things are what I was talking about. There's something wrong with you. It's none of my business, but you act screwy."

"So do most people."

"Why did you get mad at Riggsy?"

"Because it's nobody's business but mine when I go in the Army. I don't like cracks about it."

"Don't think you can fool anybody about being a cheechako. We can always tell," Aasie told McQueen.

"Well," she said doubtfully, "maybe boys in Alaska don't take it so seriously. I've heard a lot of kidding about it but I never saw anybody flare up so before."

"Let's skip it. What else?"

"For another thing, you don't go around asking women in taxis to go home with you. Why start with me?"

"How in hell do you know what I go around doing?"

"I ought to know whether you go around doing that. I've been asked enough."

"You recognize the amateur touch, eh? Well, maybe so." McQueen looked out the window at the snow-patched outskirts of town.

"Something's on your mind. If you just came to Fairbanks, you probably haven't got anybody else to tell it to. You might as well unload on me."

McQueen hesitated. He said, "Thanks. It's no worse than that I need a job. After I pay for this cab and buy you a drink, I'll need a job bad. If I want to eat after breakfast tomorrow."

"If that's all. . . . Everybody knows it costs money to get up here. Most people land broke. I ought to be able to tell you the person to see. What do you do?"

"I'm a pilot."

"Pilot? Airplanes?"

"Airplanes."

"Well, that ought to be simple. Everybody in Alaska's always looking for pilots. Especially now."

McQueen was still watching houses go by through the window. "Maybe."

"Anchorage Airlines is about the biggest. Why don't you try them?"

"I have."

She said, "Oh! It's like that, is it? Well, let me think."

The black look was on his face again. "Don't strain anything."

It didn't bother her. She said, "I won't. Here's the Tavern. You buy me that drink and then I'll let you walk home with me."

The Tavern was another smoky saloon with a table-sized dance floor. Except that the door opened on a sidewalk, it was no different from the Mile Post. More crowded, perhaps. More Air Force and Infantry uniforms from nearby Ladd Field. More wintering miners and prospectors and construction workers in rough shirts.

Among all of the last, no one paid much attention to one more big man in a worn leather jacket and nondescript pants. One or two gave Aasie an appreciative eye and a few of them knew her. But all of them took a second look at the breadth of shoulders under the leather jacket alongside her and turned their attention back to their drinking.

McQueen scowled at a couple of the uniforms but they ignored him, politely. If they noticed it.

Aasie did. She said, "What in the world is it about those uniforms that makes you bristle like a mean sled-dog?"

"Never mind."

"Look, mister! I don't mind a good fight once in a while, but I'm not following anybody around just to help him hunt one up. You behave or I'll find somebody else to talk to."

"Go ahead."

She stared at him for a moment. Then she laughed. "I ought to. But you'd probably think it was a good excuse to start another rumpus. Come on, take me home."

They walked half a dozen blocks away from the paved, brick-built center of town into a district of cabins and square, boxlike little houses. It was a decent neighborhood. Most of the cabins had shrubbery of some kind here and there, and there were garden plots fenced in.

She kissed him good-by strictly at the door. But before she did, she said, "You go see Morse Mixon. He's got a couple of planes that he's always hunting pilots for. And—I told you—he likes you."

McQueen asked, "Why would he be any more likely to give me a job than Anchorage?"

"Jerry, I get along fine in Alaska by minding my own business. I learned it from my old man, who's been getting along fine for forty years up here by minding his. Get the point?"

McQUEEN walked back by a different route, looking the town over. It was still surprising to him. The log huts and the tiny houses were what he had looked for in interior Alaska. Paved streets and six-story buildings, sidewalks and night clubs, were not.

When they had talked to him in Washington, he had had to search the map to learn where Fairbanks was. It was startlingly far north of Chilkoot and Skagway and Sitka, the names which had always meant Alaska to him. He had felt positive relief that Nome was even farther—not that he knew anything comfortable about Nome.

That had been on the last day he could still call himself John McQueen, Major, United States Army Air Forces. He remembered telling Joe Douglas that that latitude would kill a man whose blood had been thinned as his had by a year in Panama.

Douglas had been unsympathetic. He had said, "You'll be there in summer when it's nearly as hot as Panama, you uneducated ape. Besides, there's worse things can happen to your tail than freezing." Meaningfully.

McQueen and Joe Douglas had been friends since their Randolph Field days, before the war. Douglas hadn't ever been a particularly humorous fellow. Now, since he was in A-2, Intelligence, he seemed less so than ever.

McQueen admitted, a little bitterly, "A man makes a mistake, I suppose he has to pay for it. But—until you bloody brass hats make up your minds to court-martial me out of it—I'm still in uniform. You can send me any place you please. I'm just saying that I'm not cut out for this job. I'm no gumshoe, I'm an aviator."

"That's not what the boys say who saw where you parked that P-38 on the mountain in Honduras."

"Don't tell me I can't fly, Joe."

"I don't know that I'm not wasting my time trying to tell you anything. I don't know that you can fly. You took off from Trinidad against orders."

"I took off without a clearance, yes."

"You took off without orders. Because you had a date with some floozie in Cristobal. And you washed out a fifty-thousand-dollar airplane at a time when good men were getting down on their knees at night and praying for P-38s."

"The weather map didn't look bad to me. Those guys hold up clearance sometimes just to demonstrate their importance. I thought I could fly it."

"You thought! There are a lot of people who will have to be convinced that you can think. The general is one of them. We had to talk a long time to let you keep this chance. We've been friends a long time, Mac, but under the circumstances I can't say I care to hear you beefing."

"Well, will it hurt your sensitive ear if I say that this is a hell of a 'leave for rest and relaxation' after two months in the jungle?"

"You look about as much in need of rest and relaxation as a bull elk in October."

McQueen said, "You might have something there, too, chum."

Douglas leaned back and looked at him. He asked, "Mac, don't you realize that you're acting like a kid? A fool kid, at that? You're in bad here, Mac. Real bad. The general doesn't like to hear of squadron commanders who pull what you did. When the orders went out to bring you straight to Washington if you ever showed up again, it wasn't to give you another job. It was for something entirely different. I shouldn't have to tell you what. This job up north is something which you are peculiarly fitted to do. It was sold to the general as something which nobody else we know of right now could do. And it badly needs doing."

McQueen said, "I don't intend to be haunted all my life just because I happened to grow up in Japan."

"You can call it haunted, if you want to. Right now, that particular fact is the most valuable military asset you have. In fact, I might say that it's the only one."

"Well, that's frank."

Douglas said patiently, "I've been trying to give you the facts, Mac."

"That's another thing, speaking of facts. I don't believe there are any Japs in Alaska. At least, not with any airbase."

"That is something else again. We hope you're right. But we're afraid you're not."

Douglas went to the wall and swept his hand across the top of a large-scale map of the continent. "Ever hear of the Porcupine River, or the Black and Little Black? No? Here's Fort Yukon—you've heard of that—and here's Circle. Circle's on the Yukon. North of Circle and west of Fort Yukon, between the Porcupine and the Yukon and split by those other two rivers, is a country that's supplied by boat and barge on the Yukon and which nobody knows a damn thing about. There are a few mines up there and one government station. But there's probably tens of thousands of square miles that a white man has never seen, so far as we know."

"I imagine there are other places you can say the same thing about. Do there have to be Japs in all of them?"

"I'll tell you all we know. A bush pilot reported seeing a strange airplane in here, near a place the map calls Salmon River. That's on the Black. Some of our people at Ladd Field went out in a B-18 to look. They didn't come back."

McQueen said, "There's always weather and mountains."

Douglas didn't laugh. "Georgie Criqui was flying that airplane. He had a radio. He was shot down, Mac."

"Georgie, eh? Ever find him?"

"Two weeks later. In the plane. With a 7.7 slug in him."

"Nobody got out?"

"Nobody."

McQUEEN said slowly, "That doesn't sound good. What about this radio?"

"The radioman got off one message. I know it by heart. It was, 'Unidentified aircraft on approaching course. Single engine, radial, fixed gear. Tank bulges or bombs below wing. Position. . . .'"

"Hell, that's an old 97 fighter!"

Douglas nodded. "Sounds like it. The message went on to give their position but it was never finished. They were a hundred and fifty miles north of the landing field at Coal Creek but he didn't get to give his course. Because the last two words of the message were, 'Airplane attacking.'"

McQueen thought it over. "What in hell could Japs be doing up there? And how could they have got there?"

"To your first question: they could be doing any one of many things. It could be a diversion, or it could be just plain insurance."

"What do you mean, diversion?"

"Look what a few Japs in the Aleutians cost us. We couldn't afford to leave them there. Think of what it cost in men and ships and airplanes to get them out. And searching this whole Arctic area for one little nest of the buzzards would be something nearly as tough."

"Yeah, I see it. Even if we searched from the air, we'd have to have a big base to work from."

"And we haven't got it nearer than Tanana. Not near enough. Now, as for insurance: some day we may want to fly that northern route on business of our own. If they've got 97s, they've got bombers. And one good whack at our stations along the way, and we'd be rebuilding for a year. A year is a long time, McQueen, and they're playing for time."

McQueen thought it over. He said, "All right. Give me the dope. What do I do and how do I do it?"

"Intelligence at Ladd Field suggests that somebody come up who can get by as a tramp pilot. A guy with a shady license, but time in on all kinds of light stuff; one who is trying to duck service. A-2 at Ladd thinks such a man might get a line on where this mess of maggots is by finding out how their supplies got in originally."

"I don't get it."

"Neither do I, exactly," Douglas confessed. "There are a lot of little mines up in that country. They get their machinery and supplies in by floating them up the Yukon on barges in the summer and then moving them

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across country on cat trains in the winter. Nobody has ever paid much attention, in the past, to what went in or where it went. A-2 up there thinks that there has been some local help on the job and that he can tell you how to find out."

"In other words, I'll get my instructions up there."

"That's the picture. A man—captain—named Ron Gilbert is the A-2. He came down here to tell us about it and ask for somebody to work from the outside. About all the real dope he has is that this place, he thinks, has a friendly hookup with a tribe of mean Indians."

"Sort of wild and woolly, isn't it? You sure this Gilbert isn't a bit teched in the haid?"

Douglas said quietly, "Georgie Criqui was touched, too."

McQueen grunted. "That's right. There's always going to be Criqui. You know, I always liked that guy."

"Yes, I know what you mean. Well, Gilbert also thinks that he can put you on to the man whose trail might lead into this deal. So you're going to Fairbanks and drop a note at the post office addressed to Gilbert in a way I'll tell you. Gilbert will take over from there in his own fashion. All you'll have to do is establish yourself as a general son-of-a-bitch and particularly a guy with little love for either the Army or his country. Now, the details. . . . Wait a minute, there's one more thing: When Gilbert was here, he got the general to ask Ground Forces for a detail of paratroops. They'll probably be there when you hit. With them around, all you have to do is find the skunks. They'll take care of smoking 'em out."

McQueen said sourly, "I can see where you weren't raised, my friend. Did you ever try to smoke out a skunk?"

Douglas only said, "Now as I was saying, the details of your getting up there. . . ."

And so here he was. One thing hadn't been as hard as he'd expected. Enough people across the country had asked him for his draft card, and treated him generally like a bad smell, to make his surliness toward uniforms come natural.

Tonight—that had been something of a break, too. The little Rogness girl. She'd been the first female who hadn't looked at him as if he were a toad. Seeing her with the big infantry lieutenant and finding that she was friendly had made his first opportunity to advertise his feelings toward the Army something of a pleasure. When the big lieutenant, voicing his reasonable objections to the attempted piracy, had felt called upon to mention that McQueen—Mason—would look better in uniform, that punch had been sincere.

CHAPTER II

MIXON'S EMISSARY

IN THE morning, McQueen fought to stay asleep against the sun which, even in May, rose at an ungodly hour. Finally he gave up and rolled out. He worked the kinks out of his back with a rueful glance at the lumpy bed. Cheap hotels all got their mattresses from the same quarry, even in Alaska. Then he wrote his note to Captain Gilbert, sealed it, and stowed it away in the flat pouch about his waist. The way his first day in Fairbanks had gone, there was no telling what might happen on the way to the post office.

But his walk to the letter drop was uneventful. He got rid of the letter and then set out to find Morse Mixon. From breakfast, he returned to his room and called the Mile Post from there. No one answered.

The clerk downstairs told him, "Try the Tavern. If he's in town, he usually goes there."

At the Tavern, the bartender was cleaning up the back bar and serving a handful of early morning customers. Their shirts and whiskers looked sourdough but McQueen didn't yet consider himself an expert.

He asked the bartender, "Have you seen Morse Mixon this morning?"

The man said, "Wasn't looking for him."

Somebody at the other end of the bar cackled. McQueen said, "Maybe I should go back outside and start all over. What's the best way to get a civil answer to a question in these parts?"

The bartender turned from his dusting and looked him over. Finally, he said, "He hasn't been in. Might be, after a while."

A wiry little man with a scraggly, graying beard and a thin, reddened nose came down the bar and spoke to McQueen. His voice was high and had an undecipherable accent.

"Mistuh, ain't you th' one that laid out that soldier at th' Mile Post, las' night?"

"Seems to me I remember having some trouble out there."

The other whinnied. "Hee-hee! You didn't have no trouble. Pretties' wallop I seen in a long time. Have a drink?"

McQueen said, "Well . . . it's a little early in the day for me."

The little man stared at him in honest surprise. "Early in the day! What in hell's the time uh day got to do with it?"

McQueen said, "Come to think of it, I don't know. All right."

"We'll have a couple of drinks an' I'll he'p you hunt up Morse Mixon. He's a friend of

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE INFANTRY—
THE DOUGHBOY DOES IT!

mine and I gen'ly know wheah he's a-hangin' out."

He led McQueen out of the pavement district into another street of cabins and tiny white houses. McQueen thought it wasn't far from where he'd left the blond girl, the night before.

The little man talked tirelessly all the way. "Stranger, ain't yuh, son? Thought so. Cheechalker, we call 'em, but no offense by it. Muh name's Jameson, 'Red-eye' Jameson. Comes on account I used tuh like plenty noise with m' licker. Hollerin' 'Red-eye! Red-eye!' all the time, for some reason. Don't remember now just what. What you want tuh see Morse Mixon about, son, if you don't mind my askin'?"

"I don't mind. I want to ask him for a job."

"Job, huh? Bouncer?"

"Anything."

Jameson peered at him with eyes bright as a chipmunk's. "Anything, huh? Whyn't yuh go out to Ladd Field? Lots uh jobs oot there on the air base. Pay good, too."

McQueen spat ostentatiously into the muddy street and made no other answer.

The little man cackled again. "I remember yuh don't like th' Ahmy much. Don't blame yuh. They come up heah and ack like they own th' place. Bunch uh peckerhaids. Most of them don't know sickum aboot Alaska but yuh can't tell 'em a damn thing. Heah's a place Morse might be."

They stopped beside one of the little white houses and Jameson rapped. There was a cardboard placard hung by a string over the knob of the door. McQueen stared at it. It was roughly lettered, THIS IS A PRIVATE HOME. SCRAM.

Jameson said, "Hee-hee! Some uh the boys get a li'l mixed up in their directions, late at night. Lots uh people hang those out, to keep from bein' bothered."

A dark-haired woman in sweater and slacks opened the door. She was wide-shouldered and full-breasted. Her bare forearms looked strong and very capable. Except for a dark sprouting above lips that matched the arms and shoulders, she was good-looking.

Jameson said, "Morning, Alice. Morse wouldn't be around, would he?"

She stepped aside for them to enter. She said only, "I'll call him. Come on in."

"Young friend uh mine wants to see him. Name of. . . ."

"Mason. Jerry Mason," McQueen told them.

The woman disappeared and did not return. They heard her speak, somewhere in the back of the house, and a rumbling mutter answer her. In two or three minutes Mixon came in the door through which she had gone, pulling a robe together over a matted, enormous chest.

He grinned at them sleepily. Rather, he grinned at Jameson. His eyes, on McQueen, were pale and as expressionless as slate.

"Hello, Red-eye. Who's dead?"

"I remember yuh don't like the Ahmy much," the little man cackled. "Don't blame yuh."

"I am, neahly. Only a drink would save me."

"No reason why not."

MIXON took glasses and a bottle, ready on a table against the wall, and offered them. He went to the kitchen for water and splashed it in Jameson's glass. McQueen was still standing with bottle and glass in either hand, staring at the brown bear hide on the wall over the desk.

Mixon followed his eyes. "Big, 'un, eh?"

"I didn't know they grew them that big," McQueen admitted. What he was thinking was that the bear couldn't have been much bigger than Mixon. Nor much hairier.

Jameson gulped half his glassful, burped, and wiped his whiskers. "Yah-hah! That's whiskey! Jus' what you get ovuh th' bah in the Mile Post."

Mixon laughed. "If I sold it, I wouldn't have any left to give my friends when they come to see me. What can I do for you, Red-eye?"

"Talk to my young friend heah. Meet Jerry Mason, Morse. Ah know yuh met last night, but Ah don't hahdly think you'd call it a fo'mal introduction."

Mixon put out his hand and McQueen tried to get his own around it. John McQueen was no midget, pushing six feet and one-ninety, but everything about Mixon made him feel undeveloped.

McQueen said, "I got Jameson to bring me out here to talk to you. I want to ask you if you need a pilot."

"A pilot! You a pilot?"

"Four thousand hours."

"What kind of ship?"

"Any kind."

Mixon asked, watching him, "Army, too, maybe?"

McQueen stared him down. "Maybe. Maybe not."

"What's your license?"

"Four-M. And instruments."

"Why are you hitting me?"

"The license," McQueen said casually, "was suspended a few months ago. For two years. I had a little trouble about a clearance."

He might as well mix a little truth in. He'd always heard that was what made good liars. And the ticket in his worn billfold, carefully forged for him by the Civil Aeronautics people in Washington, bore the same story.

Mixon said, "I see. Who told you I was putting out any charity?"

"Who told you I was asking for any?" McQueen told him steadily. "A man has a right to make a living. In the States, I heard the CAA hadn't got to Alaska."

"Ho! Hell they ain't, boy! Well, we'll put it this way: What gave you the idea I would hire a blacklist pilot? Or that I had any use for any kind?"

"You don't keep hay in that shed behind your roadhouse. Or do you?"

Mixon stared at him, unblinking. Finally, he said, "Come and see me at the Mile Post tonight. At eleven sharp. Can do?"

"Can do."

"Now how about both of you havin' a drink and beatin' it? Man in my business has to get his sleep around this time of day."

McQueen and Jameson walked back to the Tavern. At least, Jameson headed there like a homing pigeon and McQueen went along to buy him a drink for his trouble. After that, he tried to leave but the old sourdough, now well on what appeared to be his daily way, followed him and would not shake loose. McQueen debated telling him that he wanted to go back to his room and sleep. His night might prove to be active, too.

But a sudden impulse tripped his tongue before he caught it. He asked, "Red-eye, you remember that gal who went out of the Mile Post with me last night?"

"Hee-hee! Ol' Nils Rogness' daughter? Sho'."

"Well, where would she be about now? You know everything. Does she work somewhere in town, or what?"

"At the city swimmin' pool. She runs it. You thinkin' uh goin' ovuh theah?"

"Yes, I'm thinking of it."

"Yuh'll have tuh go by yuhself, then. Some uh them young hellions'll push yuh in. Me, I cain't swim no more'n a prairie dog."

McQueen found the pool—another startling Alaskan experience—and Aasie behind the bathhouse counter. She'd evidently been trying out her own establishment, because her swim suit was wet. What he could see of it above the counter was superbly filled.

He said, "My God, what a country! I leave you in a fur parka and find you in a bathing suit."

She said, "In a month or so, even the nights will be warm. For a month or so. And how are you?"

"Fine. And you?"

"Didn't have any more fights after you got rid of me?"

"Nary a fight."

He looked at the pool. The water looked clean and inviting. He said, "I didn't look for mermaids in Alaska. You run this?"

"The city owns it but I run it. Swimming teacher, lifeguard, suit-renter and, most of the time, janitor. Want to try it?"

"I might. Better wait until I see if I have two bits left. I've had to entertain a local character again this morning. This one had whiskers and a hollow leg."

"Never mind. I'll give you this one on the house. Civic hospitality."

She tossed him a pair of trunks and a towel. She asked, soberly, "Did you do what I told you to, yet?"

"See Mixon?"

"Uh-huh."

"I just saw him. I don't get an answer until tonight but I think it's going to be all right."

HE WENT to a booth and got into the trunks. Coming out, he dunked a cautious toe in the water, found it not too bad, and looked over his shoulder at Aasie. She was still behind the counter.

McQueen said, "Hey. Don't I get a lesson with the pants?"

"Swimming lesson, my eye! Where'd you get that color? Working on a chain gang?"

He looked down at himself in remembering dismay. Those two months in the Honduras jungle had left him the shade of rubbed walnut. In the future, he saw that he had better keep his shirt on. Nobody ever acquired color like that north of the tropics.

He splashed up and down the pool a couple of times and tried to talk Aasie out from behind the counter to see what the rest of that swim suit looked like. But she stayed there, and he soon found that the air wasn't as warm as it had felt with his clothes on.

Aasie said she had to keep the pool open through the afternoon. Also, she said that Lieutenant Riggs wanted to talk to her about something that night. Maybe he wasn't mad at her, after all. McQueen, personally, doubted that but he didn't feel called upon to say so.

So he killed the afternoon at a shiny new movie house. That evening, he thought it would be well in character if he walked to the Mile Post to meet Mixon. Unless he could

manage to thumb a ride for part of the way.

There were few cars on the road that early. None stopped for him. Walking wasn't unaccustomed exercise for him, after those months in the jungle, and he swung along easily, thinking the whole proposition over as far as he could see it now. He wondered what kind of a bootleg job Morse Mixon could have for a pilot with no license. Could it by any chance be Mixon whom the A-2 at Ladd Field suspected?

Mixon was a suspicious sort of character, judged by any sort of standards McQueen had ever been used to. But any standards McQueen had been used to didn't fit a lot of things he had seen in Alaska. It could be, though. It very well could be.

That line of thought brought him to something that stopped him short, mentally and physically. He stood there in the road, thinking it over. Why had Nixon said eleven o'clock? He hadn't repeated it, that McQueen could remember. But he had been emphatic enough. Eleven o'clock. Why should a man like Mixon, who would spend the whole night around a place like the Mile Post, care whether McQueen came out at eleven o'clock or four in the morning?

Of course, it might be to meet somebody. On the other hand, it might be to keep him from being somewhere else at eleven o'clock. And there was only one place Mixon could reasonably expect him to be.

McQueen turned and started back to town, almost at a lope. It was about ten-thirty. At five to eleven, he slid his key quietly into the lock of his hotel room door, twisted it and threw the door open with one quick motion.

He closed it from the inside and stood with his back to it, flipping the light switch as he did so. He could hear breathing before the light went on.

The man across the room, half-twisted to face him, with flashlight still in hand, was short and dark. His face had the flat, Asiatic look of many Northern Indians. His clothes, a filthy red-and-black wool shirt and canvas pants, were typically nondescript Alaskan. McQueen had already seen a hundred like him on the streets of Anchorage and Fairbanks. His eyes had a black, obsidian glitter in the sudden light and the lids above them were somehow odd.

McQueen said, "Well, did you find anything worth stealing?"

The black eyes flicked to the door, around to the window, and back to the door again. The man did not look at McQueen. Neither did he answer. The flat, round face was set and stupid. It didn't look very frightened.

McQueen moved to open the door and kick him out. Then he stopped. He'd come back to see if somebody was interested in his room. Finding just a native sneak-thief was too much coincidence. Better wait and think this thing over.

The intruder's obsidian eyes flicked toward the door, to the window, then back to the door.

The native had started for the door as he saw McQueen move to open it. McQueen stopped and he stopped, too, facing McQueen and the light more fully. There was something familiar about that shirt.

McQueen said thoughtfully, "I suppose they say, up here, that all natives look alike. Maybe you're the lad I saw outside the Mile Post last night, maybe you aren't. But you better tell me what you've been up to in here. I know damned well there wasn't anything to steal."

Keeping the man within his range of vision, McQueen glanced quickly over the room. His eyes checked the bed, the dresser, the one chair, and the little writing table beside the chair. Something registered there and McQueen nearly choked.

It couldn't be so simple—he couldn't have been so simple! But he had been. He had written the note to Gilbert with that scratchy, ink-spraying hotel pen and had, undoubtedly, blotted it on the frayed green blotter on top of the table. Now there was no blotter on the table.

McQueen had time to think, "I told that damn Douglas that this was no business for me to be in!" before he had to move. The man in front of him had followed McQueen's eyes and read them right. But McQueen's hand whipped from the door-handle to his left armpit and

came down with the stubby, silencer-fitted .380 just in time.

The other man swayed backward and relaxed again. McQueen looked him over. There was a trace of a straight, horizontal bulge across the front of the dirty shirt at about the third button.

McQueen said softly, *"Chotto matte kudasai! Nan no go yo desuka?"*

THE unwinking eyes remained blankly expressionless. McQueen was in a situation where guessing was necessary and his guess was that he had been understood. But the man wasn't saying why he was there.

He said grimly, "You speak English, anyhow. So speak some, and quick!"

There was something very convincing in McQueen's voice and in his big fist around the pistol butt. The black eyes studied it and the tubular, efficient-looking silencer, and lifted again to McQueen's face. Finally, he spoke.

"Name's Joe Wasilla," he said gutturally. If he had not once heard it daily, McQueen thought he probably would have missed the faint slurring of those *l's*. "Work at Mile Post. Got in wrong room. Mistake."

"So? You work at the Mile Post? For Morse Mixon?"

"Morse Mixon, that's right."

"Could be," McQueen muttered, mostly to himself. "Could be. Well, unbutton your shirt. Let's see what you were taking back to Mixon. Unbutton it! And stay right where you are while you're doing it!"

The slouching figure had stiffened again. McQueen held his line of metal pointed at the other's navel and waited grimly, watching his eyes. The eyes narrowed and seemed to come slowly into focus.

The man said—and now the lack of *l's* was unmistakable— "Aw right. Mixon says go to room in hoter-r and rook at suitcase, crothes. Bring back papers, maybe."

McQueen thought it over. The note to Gilbert was addressed to a postoffice box number—a fake—and the contents were inane and meaningless. Gilbert and Joe Douglas had doped out the code when Gilbert was in Washington, and it probably couldn't be broken. It might do no harm to let the man go. Might even be a good trail to follow.

He had got that far when Wasilla took the choice away from him. McQueen's reflexes were fast but, this time, not fast enough. The short man dived straight forward from his toes, hitting McQueen just above the knees. As the man drove forward, he threw his bared right forearm sharply upward, knocking the pistol up and to the left. McQueen kept presence of mind enough not to fire and he went down with the gun still securely in his hand.

The native—or Jap—had a good tackler's grip on his legs and, as they went down, he twisted hard, throwing McQueen on his face and reversing his own position so that he was over McQueen's body, more or less back to back. The little man was quick and powerful and his legs were like live rubber. McQueen had seen judo and he did not need the lance of pain that shot up his right leg to tell him that the twist-and-bar grip which the Jap had on his foot and ankle was going to cost him a broken knee in another second.

McQueen did the only thing there was for him to do. Relaxing in spite of that ripping pain, he slumped his face against the floor and curved his right arm behind his back, sliding the back of his hand down along his side until the pistol muzzle met something and he couldn't feel it. Then he closed his grip.

The sound, muffled as well against the man's hip, was barely audible. The weight slipped off McQueen's back and he got to his feet, testing his right leg gingerly. He looked down at the Jap.

The man was on his back, his hands pressed over a darkening spot on his thigh where the slug had evidently entered. His eyes were dull and expressionless again.

McQueen said, "One more chance, Tojo. You talk and I'll call Intelligence at Ladd Field and turn you over. They'll see about plugging that hole. Otherwise, I'm afraid your usefulness to the Tenno is over."

The man gritted his teeth a little but kept them shut. McQueen muttered, "I shouldn't be taking even so much of a chance with you." He said, "There's one thing I guess I've got to be sure of. I suppose this is what you call killing in cold blood, and I sure as hell couldn't do it to anything but a Jap. So. . . ." He paused, then said slowly in Japanese, "The Emperor is a filthy hog. Isn't he, Tojo?"

The lips writhed over protruding teeth and McQueen had to jerk himself away so that the spit would miss him. He said, "O.K., Tojo. Too bad you aren't a man. I'll have to admit you're checking out like one."

He hesitated for an instant, but he thought of Georgie Criqui and some other things and heard the faint thud of the shot immediately after.

There wasn't much blood, yet, and he couldn't afford to wait until there was. He threw up the single window and swept a quick look along the alley, twenty feet below. Nothing stirred. Taking only time to rip open the shirt and pull out the folded blotter, he pushed the body through the window, lowered it to arm's length, and dropped it.

So far, so good. If his luck held and he was able to move that thing in the alley halfway down the block, at least far enough to point immediate suspicion in some other direction than at Room 234 in the Northern Hotel, he would be able to feel some satisfaction in not

McQueen's reflexes were not fast enough this time. The man dived and hit him just above the knees.

having bungled this job at the beginning.

But his luck ran out. The room wasn't hard to clean up, but Old Man Jameson was waiting for him in the lobby, ten feet from the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER III

MIXON'S OFFER

RED-EYE said, "Hi, theah, son! Wasn't you supposed tuh have a date some place tonight? I thought you was goin' out to thuh Mile Post."

McQueen said, "That's right On my way now."

"Figured you was. Figured you was a little late. Thought I might drop out theah myse'f. 'Bout to go?"

"Right this minute. I'm walking, though."

"Walkin'! Son, you cain't do that. Man never walks in Alaska—that is, if he's got uh friend with th' price of a taxi. We're civilized, what you might say in spots. That's one of th' spots. Le's go."

There wasn't much else to do but go along. Jameson was a persistent old nuisance and he'd undoubtedly wait out any excuse for delay which McQueen could dream up on the spur of the moment. Maybe nobody would run across what was left of Wasilla until McQueen could get back. Or . . . McQueen thought he had an idea.

The old man man jabbered all the way to the Mile Post. McQueen gave up even pretending to listen and concentrated on trying to think his way around Morse Mixon. Red-eye didn't mind. He talked as much and as cheerfully whether he had a listener or not.

However, toward the end of the trip, McQueen's attention was caught by something the old man was saying. ". . . yessuh, I sho' did. I made mo' money makin' that tractuh comp'ny pay for whut I might've made, if'n I'd've got my stuff in, than I could've made minin' in ten years."

"What was that again?"

"I said, they paid me for the price of the tractuh, plus what I claimed I might've made minin'. And I always was an optimist when I start to figurin' what I'm goin' to make next year."

"I heard that part. But why?"

"You wasn't payin' no attention to the fust of th' story," Red-eye told him equably. "I was sayin' that, one time, I bought a tractuh in Seattle, t'be shipped to Nome an' barged up the river to Fort Yukon. It had to be delivered up there before the freeze-up, so I could use it to pull my cat-train in durin' the winter, in order to mine the followin' summer. That was in th' contrack."

"The river?" McQueen asked. "You mean the Yukon?"

"What else? Well, some son in Seattle fergot to drain the radiator on this cat before shippin' it. Nobody thought o' checkin', all the way up. I didn't get into Fort Yukon until late, after the freeze, and here was my cat settin' there on the bank all froze-up and bust. Head clean cracked."

"Where were you going to go with it?"

"Up the Little Black, on the ice. Well, I couldn't get another cat for a year, so there I was. No way to haul in, at all. Nothin' to do but sell off my stuff and spend the winter sittin' around Fort Yukon playin' stud and drinkin' hooch with an old Siwash named George that was chief of a mob of Indians, out in the brush aways. After two drinks, he was always wantin' me to come out and look at his young squaws."

"That the only way you can get supplies into that country?"

"Well, it's the only good way."

"Pretty expensive, I'd think. Can't be much gets in."

"It's an expensive country, son. Beer's a dollar a bottle in Fort Yukon. Been only a year or two that people up there ever even saw any piece of money smaller'n a four-bit piece. But there's lots o' stuff goes in, just the same. Or used to. I seen winters when those cat-trains were so thick they needed block signals along the track."

"That's a lot of cat-trains."

"That's a big country. Why, there was one bunch up in the Little Black country, not so long ago, either, that must've hauled in a couple thousand tons one winter."

"Pretty good-sized mine to use that much, wouldn't it be? What was that one?"

"Oh, th' Northeastern, or somethin' like that. I dunno that it was so big. Most uh the stuff was machinery, as I remember it. Prob'ly some newfangled process that didn't turn out to be wuth a durn."

"Well, it must have been pretty rich, anyway, to pay for it."

"Dunno as that follows along, either. There's about as much money goes into holes in the ground in Alaska, son, as ever did come out. 'Bout this one, I don't remember's I ever did hear about how much color they ever took out. Can't remember that I ever heard very much about it at all."

The Mile Post was crowded again. Sourdoughs, soldiers, workers from the new air base and women of assorted sizes and intentions packed the bar and the tables. Mixon was behind the bar. He saw McQueen come in and motioned to him, turning down the bar toward a door at the far end. McQueen followed him and Jameson trailed along.

The room on the other side of the door was an office with a dusty, littered desk and the inevitable bearskin on the wall. Mixon walked around behind the desk and stood for a moment without speaking. He didn't look pleased.

He said, "You're a little late, Mason."

"I had some trouble getting away."

If Mixon thought anything of that, he didn't show it. He only said, "When I hire a man, I like to know whether I can depend on him doing what I tell him, the way I tell him."

"All depends on the kind of men you hire, I suppose," McQueen told him noncommittally. "Some probably get it done. On the other hand, some don't."

He thought that Mixon's gaze might have sharpened a little at that.

Jameson said, "Morse, he prob'ly wouldn't 've been here yet, if I hadn't brung him. And what kind uh thanks do I get fer it?"

"All right, Red-eye. We'll have a drink. Then you scram and let me talk some business with Mason."

THEY had the drink and Jameson went back to the bar. Mixon closed the door behind him. The din of the orchestra hammered through the thin wooden walls and made the room as private as if sound-proofed.

Mixon said, "All right, Mason. You were trying to make with some kind of a riddle. What held you up?"

"Your man Wasilla."

Mixon muttered an exasperated curse. "Damn that dumb Indian! What happened?"

"I found him in my room, evidently just finished with going through my suitcase. He said you had sent him."

"Oh, he did, eh?" The big man stared at McQueen. "How did he happen to say that?"

McQueen shrugged. "I asked him and he told me. Evidently he thought it was a good idea."

Mixon continued to watch him. He asked, "Where's Wasilla now?"

"In the alley behind the hotel."

"In the alley! What in hell's he doing there?"

"Nothing," McQueen told him evenly. "Nothing at all. He isn't going to be doing anything any more."

"You mean—dead?"

"That's right."

The big man seemed shaken, in spite of himself. Involuntarily, his hand went out for the whiskey bottle on the desk. He said, "Christ, you're calm enough about it!"

"No reason why I shouldn't be," McQueen said coolly.

"No reason? Not about murder?"

"It wasn't murder. He broke into my room, in the first place, and he jumped me, in the second place. If he hadn't done that, he'd probably have got back to tell you what he found."

"What did he find?"

"Nothing."

Mixon, still gripping the bottle, went back of the desk and sat down, heavily. He asked, after a moment, "Why'd you leave him in the alley? That doesn't seem so smart."

McQueen relaxed a little. Evidently, Wasilla's boss didn't intend to make anything of it, after all. "It probably wasn't. But there wasn't anything else I could do. I met Jameson in the lobby, just as I was coming down."

"Well, what are you going to do, leave him there?"

"I'll see about it when I go back in."

Mixon said suddenly, "No. I'll take care of him."

He got back to his feet and came around the desk toward the door. McQueen stayed where he was, in the way. He said, "Just a minute."

Mixon stopped. He looked more worried than anything else. He said mildly, "Neither one of us has any time to waste right now."

"Maybe so. But I'd like to know where you're going."

"I'm going to send somebody to get Wasilla—what's left of him—and get him out of sight."

"Why?"

"It ain't because of your big blue eyes, fella. Maybe I'll tell you about it, after a while."

"Maybe you better tell me now."

Mixon said heavily, "Don't be makin' any promises you can't keep. I'm going to have Wasilla dragged off and cached somewhere because I've got a reason for not wanting it known that anything happened to him. I might tell you, later, what the reason is, or I might not. You got nothing to lose, that I can see. You got no sensible way of stopping me, no matter what I'm going to do."

"Well," McQueen admitted, "you've got something there. You don't mind if I ask you to hurry back, do you?"

"No, I don't mind. I'll probably be back pretty quick. Have a drink."

He went out. His last suggestion appealed to McQueen. He felt that he needed a drink. But he decided that it wouldn't be smart. He might have more need of his timing, mental as well as physical, before the night was out.

Mixon wasn't long. He came back and threw himself in the chair behind the desk with a thud that nearly wrecked it, substantial as it was. He had a drink, one which would have done for both of them.

He said, "Well, they're on the way. I hope they make it."

"It wasn't murder," said McQueen coolly. "He broke into my room and jumped me."

"So do I."

"Yeah. You should. So you're a pilot . . . Mason—is that what you said your name was?"

"That's right. I am."

"And you don't stand good with the CAA?"

"Not very good."

"But you don't mind takin' a chance on getting jammed up worse by flyin' for me without a license?"

"Man's got to make a living," McQueen said. "I probably won't get jammed, though. I don't think you'll have me carrying many passengers, will you? You might not even be telling the CAA you'd hired me."

MIXON grunted. "You're too smart, fella. Too smart for your own good and maybe too smart for mine. If I didn't need a pilot bad, I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole."

"I'll say the same thing, just to keep us even. I need a job pretty bad."

"Well, you've got one. I'll give you a hundred bucks a week—although you'd probably work for less."

"For doing what?"

"Flyin', if you're as good as you say. Flyin' where I tell you, when I tell you. And keepin' your mouth shut about it."

"Flying what?"

"An old Beechcraft. Hundred and forty horse. Wheel job."

"That wasn't what I meant."

Mixon looked at him. "You hired?" he asked.

"I guess so. Maybe."

"You hired, or not? No guessing."

"I'm hired."

"O. K. Have a drink. You'll be flyin' fur, Mason, that's all. You'll be goin' in with odds and ends of trade stuff but comin' back with fur."

"Sort of warmish fur, I take it?"

"Take a drink, instead. You been readin' story books."

Mason took the bottle and poured himself a faint color in some water. He said, "What I've been reading didn't tell me how tough that sort of thing was. How bad is it?"

"Not bad at all, accordin' to one way of thinkin.' The fur belongs to the Indians, more or less. All I do is buy it from 'em."

"That wasn't what I meant."

"No," Mixon said sardonically, "I didn't think it was. I'm pretty sure it ain't your conscience that's itchin' you. You want to know what the tax would be if you got caught?"

"Naturally."

"Well, they ain't no reason I can see that you should get caught. But it would likely be ten years, if you did. Unless you felt like tellin' the marshal about me. Then it'd probably be five."

McQueen grinned. "You'd be better company than none, Mixon. I'd rather go up with even you than alone."

The big man grunted. "Don't waste your time tryin' to kid me, fella. I ain't askin' any promises. You just do like you're told and I'll be happy."

"All right. Start telling."

"O.K. It goes like this. Tonight, you go back and stay in that room in the hotel. Don't want to have anybody tyin' up what they may find out happened to Wasilla with you suddenly disappearing. But first, you hang around out in the bar and make like a bouncer. That'll give you a visible means of support. Then tomorrow some time, you an' I'll take a little trip."

Mixon swallowed his drink and stood up. "Come on. I'll introduce you to the bartenders and show you the layout."

"All right. But, by the way, you were going to tell me why you gave me the big hand with that Indian. What about that?"

Mixon stared at him for a moment. Finally, he said, "I ain't tellin' you because you're puttin' any pressure on me. But you're probably the kind of a curious buzzard that would go around askin' people questions until you had 'em guessin' why. So . . . I buy fur from the Kandiks, up at the headwaters of the Little Black. They're pretty smart, in some ways. They want to get paid off right here in town, so that they can buy their own stuff and send it in. Joe Wasilla was a Kandik and a school Indian, I guess. Anyhow, he was their local business agent."

"Sort of a contact man to keep an eye on you, eh?"

"Sort of. Well, that was it. I can't afford to have them knowin' what happened to him. They're a suspicious pack of wolverines and they might think I had somethin' to do with it. That satisfy you?"

"Sure. To tell the truth, the main reason I was curious was because I thought the guy was a Jap. I haven't seen many natives and this one looked something like a California radish farmer. I figured maybe he might even be some kind of a Jap spy."

Mixon stared again and his eyes narrowed oddly for an instant, McQueen thought. But he said, "The Army cleaned all the Japs out of Alaska, right after Pearl Harbor, far as I know. No, Wasilla was a Kandik."

"O.K.," McQueen accepted carelessly. "Well, let's go see about this strong-arm business of yours. Aren't you afraid the Army'll boycott the joint when they see me around?"

"That'd be all right with me," Mixon muttered, leading the way out. "I was doin' all right before the Army came, an' I'll be doin' all right after they go."

Outside, in the noisy, crowded tavern, McQueen could see that there probably was something in that. It was about the same time that he had been here the night before and the place, bar and booths alike, was just as jammed.

In spite of the mob of impatient customers, Mixon interrupted a tall ham-handed barkeep named Charley, and a squat, dark one called Mikulof, to introduce McQueen. After that, McQueen took a beer to a corner of the barroom near the door and out of the way of things. He didn't plan to be a very efficient bouncer.

He was there by himself, watching the crowd with a good deal of interest, when somebody spoke to him at his elbow. He turned and met the cool, even gaze of the big infantry lieutenant. This time McQueen noticed that the boy was also wearing the curled wings on a blue field of the paratroops. On the other side of the lieutenant, he saw—amazingly—Aasie Rogness.

She said, "Hello, Jerry," quickly. Then, "Riggsy! Come on! I want to dance."

LIEUTENANT RIGGS shrugged her off, politely but definitely. He was repeating, to McQueen, "We didn't quite finish our conversation last night. Suppose we step outside and be getting on with it."

McQueen grinned, but warily. He said, "Sorry. I work here now. Not allowed any private scrapping on the boss's time."

Riggs said, "Well . . ." McQueen stepped hastily out of reach. A new voice broke in.

Morse Mixon said, "Take it easy, Lieutenant.

You bump into him in town, let your conscience be your guide. But lay off him out here. I mean it."

Riggs stared at the big man and his lip curled. "What kind of a joint are you running, Mixon?" he asked contemptuously.

"My own kind."

"Maybe that's obvious."

"Maybe."

"Maybe it could stand a little remodeling."

"Yeah? Well, maybe you better not be thinkin' about doin' it. Listen, soldier!" Mixon sounded riled. "I dunno exactly what the Army's in this part of Alaska for, but I'm pretty sure it ain't for gangin' up on saloonkeepers. You don't like my place, stay out of it. Otherwise, keep your nose clean."

Riggs glared back at him for a second, then swung on Aasie. He said, "I don't like the smell of this place, at that. I think I'll be going back to town."

"Anything you say."

"No. You can stay. It would be a shame that you came all the way out here looking for your new boy-friend and I dragged you away again."

"Riggsy, I didn't come all the way out here to do anything but dance," Aasie told him patiently. "You cooked up this mess all by yourself."

The big lieutenant was mad and the position he was in made him madder. He didn't like the idea of leaving under fire but he knew that, in dignity, there was nothing else for him to do. So he had to release pressure on somebody.

He said, "Then I'll eat it by myself," gave her one disgusted look, and strode out the door.

Aasie said, "For the love of Pete! Jerry Mason, you're just plain bad luck to me. Here I am stranded again and all on account of you."

McQueen laughed. "I'll buy you a beer. Let's go sit down."

He followed her to a booth just vacated, looking at the eminently satisfactory back of her neck with an amusement he didn't have to put on, even remembering that anything bad which happened to the Army was supposed to be all right with him. What had happened to the big lieutenant was a dirty trick, but he should have known better than to be back after this girl again, after she'd ditched him so flagrantly the night before. The kid needed some education in women.

McQueen asked, "What was the Army doing back on your doorstep, anyway? After what you did to him last night, he should have nothing better for you than a poke in the eye."

"Riggsy's a gentleman. He would never even consider poking a girl in the eye."

"All I said was, 'he should have had.' I wouldn't be so sure he didn't consider it."

She laughed. "He probably did, at that. I don't think he came around tonight to see me. He wanted to talk to Dad."

"That might be as good an excuse as any."

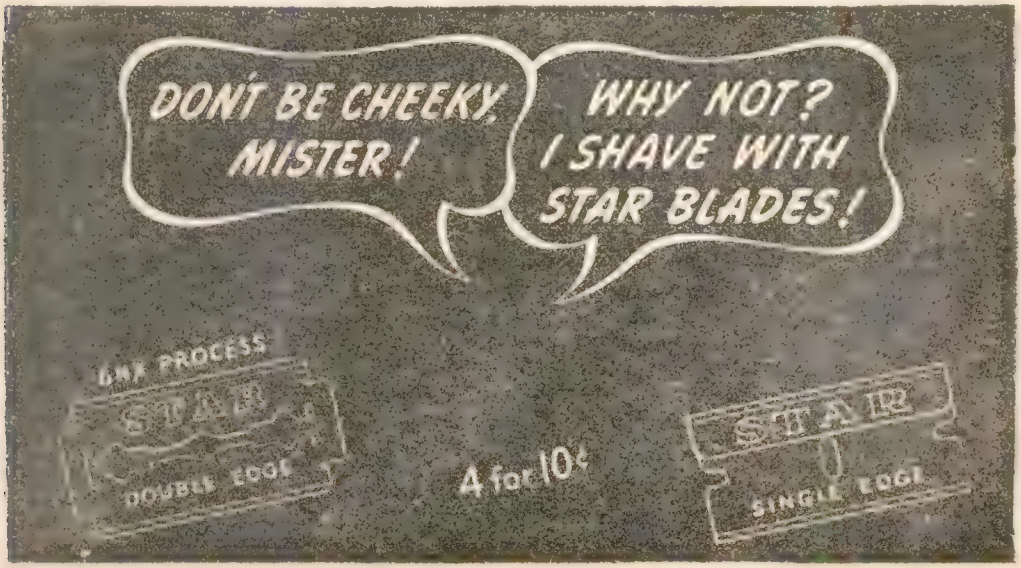
"I don't think it was an excuse. He wanted to know something about a place Dad used to prospect."

"Oh?" McQueen asked idly. "Where was that?"

"The Little Black River country. It's 'way back in the interior. Hardly anybody ever goes in there very much." Aasie seemed to have lost her overpowering desire to dance. She wanted to talk. She asked, "So you got the job?"

"I got it."

"Not flying, though?"



"Just bouncing," McQueen answered briefly.

She got the idea and dropped the subject. From then on, she talked mostly about the States, where, she said, she hadn't been since she was twelve. About women's clothes and Hollywood and this and that—nothing of any importance. Except that, once or twice, McQueen caught himself on the ragged edge of saying something very dangerous in answer to one of those artless questions.

He considered that seriously and searchingly, but he couldn't see any reason at all to ascribe it to anything but usual feminine curiosity. So, after a while, he took her back to town and home.

At the hotel, there was no excitement at all. He walked through the lobby and to his room without even seeing anyone except the dozing night clerk. Nothing in the room looked as if it had been touched since he left. So he turned in, setting his mental alarm clock for a very early hour. He was to meet Mixon at his house at ten and he had a couple of people to talk to before that.

CHAPTER IV

UP THE LITTLE BLACK

FIRST priority, in the morning, was Gilbert, the A-2. McQueen spotted a phone booth in the restaurant where he had his breakfast at seven, and had the Ladd Field operator ring Gilbert at his quarters.

McQueen said, "Hi. This's Roxy."

"Which Roxy?"

"Third from the right in the second row."

"The blonde?"

"No, the bow-legged one."

Gilbert said, "Oh, sure. I got a ticket to your show."

So that note had been delivered. Good thing, McQueen thought, that he had caught Wasilla.

He said, "What show and when?"

"The one out here tonight. Any time."

McQueen thought. There was no way in which he could get to Ladd Field at night without a chance of Mixon's getting curious. He said, "That's a bad one. The road show's got a better cast. That'll maybe be playing tonight, too."

"Nope. No dice. Well, check with me tomorrow and we'll see."

McQueen hung up and went to the counter to eat with a much better appetite. At least, his contact with the A-2 was all right and he was on some kind of a team again. This lone-wolfing wasn't all it was written up to be. It was hard on the nerves.

When he had eaten, he went looking for his second quarry, Red-eye Jameson. It was, by then, eight o'clock and Jameson shouldn't be too hard to find.

He had bad luck. Jameson wasn't in the Tavern, and McQueen had to look in on all the bars on one side of a whole block before he found him.

Red-eye said, "Hi, theah! Have a drink."

"No, thanks. Just had breakfast. Never mix food and drink."

"Good idea. Always upsets my stomach, too. So I stick to likker. Well, son, what's new?"

McQueen said, "I'll tell you, Red-eye. But I'd sooner tell you outside. How about a little walk, just as sort of an eye-opener?"

They walked a little way off the main street, down toward the river. Red-eye said, "Let's not make fools of ourse'ves ovuh this exercisin'."

"We won't," McQueen assured him. "I just want to ask you a couple of questions about mining."

"Aboot minin'! When did you get interested in minin'?"

"Last night. You know, I got a job with Mixon strong-arming drunks at the Mile Post. That doesn't pay much more than grub-money. But a fellow was telling me that he could use me this summer, flying supplies into a claim that he was just opening up."

"That gen'ally pays as well as anything in Alaska."

"That's the catch. He says he's operating on a shoe-string and that it will strain him to get the airplane. He wants to pay me with a two per cent cut in the mine. They tell me that's a fairly ordinary way to do business up here."

"I wouldn't say it was ord'nary, son, but pilots is awful scarce these days. An' chances are, this miner can't operate without grub and supplies comin' in by air."

"Then you think it would be a good deal for me?"

"That depends on where the mine is."

"Well, that's what I wanted to ask you about. Whether the mine was going to be any good."

"Where is it?"

"He said it was 'up the Little Black,' wherever that is. I thought I heard you mention some place like that, last night."

Jameson glanced at him, oddly. He said, "I did say somethin' about it, son. I didn't think you was listenin' that sharp. Yes, I had a claim up there once. Still have, as a matter of fact."

"No good, eh?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that. Not exactly that. I did think, once, that I had a piece of a little crickbed that was goin' to pay out rich. In fact, that was where I was goin' that winter that I lost m'cat."

"And you never went back?"

Red-eye rolled his tongue around his teeth and spat. Finally, he said, "There's a bunch of Indians in there, between the Little Black on one side and the Porcupine on the other, that are pretty bad. Quite a few people go in there and don't seem to come out. I figured that maybe I had enough money to pay for all the likker

I could hold and why should I go stompin' around up there where I wasn't wanted?"

McQueen laughed. "Down in the States, they used to scalp you, and farther south, they say, they shrink your head and hang it on their Christmas trees. What do these Northern Indians do, freeze you up and use you for a totem pole?"

Red-eye said, "I know, son. It's a laugh, all right. But that's the way it was. If I'd been your age, they couldn't count enough Indians to keep me away from a piece of sand with that much color. But I wasn't your age and those are mean Indians. And I'll honestly admit that some people did go in an' seemed to do all right. That big outfit I was tellin' you about was up the Little Black."

THAT, McQueen considered, made the Little Black River a fairly interesting country. He looked forward to seeing it. He didn't have to look very far forward.

He walked back to the center of town with Jameson, made an excuse to leave him, and went to the shack where Jameson had taken him to meet the big roadhouse owner the day before. The same woman let him in, in the same uninterested fashion. Mixon came out of the bedroom in wool shirt and pants and high-topped shoe-pacs. He looked down at McQueen's worn oxfords and frowned.

"Those all the shoes you got, Mason? What size you wear?"

"Ten."

"Nothing around here that'd fit you. Alice's would be too small and mine'd fall off. Well—we can't be doing anything about it this morning. But you better get you some of these pacs, first time you have a chance."

"All right. I didn't know we'd be doing any walking."

Mixon looked at him. "In this country, fella, you never know. It's a good idea to be ready for anything."

That, McQueen thought, was fair advice. He remembered it, all the way to the Mile Post. It helped him to stand the shock of the old, 1935-model Beechcraft which Charley and Mikulof had dragged out of the shed behind the tavern and were in the process of fueling. Obviously, every man around the place doubled in brass, one way or another. McQueen looked about for the people whom Mixon might have sent into town, the night before, to take care of Wasilla. But he didn't see anyone else.

McQueen asked, "We about to go some place?"

"Any time you're ready," Mixon told him.

So he climbed aboard the frowzy old witch, felt out the controls, and let Charley wind up the inertia starter. McQueen touched it off and it whined for only a second before the engine coughed huskily and caught. McQueen listened to it and nodded before he climbed down to check the rigging.

Outside, he asked Charley, "You the mechanic?"

Charley jerked his head toward Mikulof. McQueen said, "She sounds O.K."

Mikulof bared his teeth briefly. "Sheess hokay. Pritty goot sheep."

"You ready?" Mixon asked him.

"Give her five minutes. Where's the windsock?"

Charley grinned, wet his finger in his mouth, held it up, then pointed northwest. McQueen thought, "My God, what a country!"

Mixon went into the tavern and reappeared with a heavy pack. He climbed into the ship with it, stowed it away, and took his seat. McQueen checked the limits of the runway with Charley and Mikulof, then followed him.

The unloaded plane took off after a short, bumpy run across the heavy grass and they were in the air. McQueen glanced inquiringly at Mixon, in the seat beside him.

Mixon said, "Head north, away from town. Also, always stay well clear of Ladd Field. We go north until we cut a good-sized river. That'll be the Chatanika."

A few minutes' flying brought them over a river. Mixon said, "Swing east and follow it."

Fifty miles or so east, a highway crossed below them. McQueen tried to look surprised. Mixon told him, "That's the Richardson Highway. We'll follow it as far as it goes, then really go in."

"How far does it go?"

"To Circle, on the Yukon."

Mixon volunteered nothing further and didn't seem to feel much like talking. McQueen felt out the airplane some more and looked over his instrument panel and the rest of the interior. She had once been about a six-place job. All the seats but the two up forward had been ripped out and it left a fairly commodious space for freight.

There was a radio, two-way. McQueen said idly, "That's comforting—the radio, I mean. Mind if I check it? Might some time shorten one of those walks you were talking about."

Mixon grunted. "The radio's all right. Leave it alone. It lets somebody know where you are, every time you use it, too. Whether you want 'em to, or not."

McQueen let it go at that. He followed the narrow stripe of the highway for about two dull hours. The scenery below him was rugged but it was pretty much all the same, and he lost interest in it soon. He had lost it a long while before Mixon sat up and seemed to feel a new concern in it.

At a point McQueen estimated to be seventy-five or so miles west of Circle, Mixon told him to swing south. They turned and followed the new course for fifteen minutes when McQueen saw a broad, brown stream in the distance.

He asked, "What's that?"

"The Yukon."

McQueen said, "I thought the idea was that I'll be taking this trip by myself sometimes. Better tell me what goes on."

"I'm showing you the course. What more do you want?"

"Any special reason we should angle off down this way? I thought we followed that highway to Circle."

"We did, practically. We swung off to miss the town."

McQueen said, being bored about it, "All right. Now what?"

"Now you take it due northwest, until we hit the Little Black. That's about another ninety, ninety-five miles. When we make the Black, we turn south again but it'll be only a piece to where we're going."

McQUEEN had thought that the country along the Chatanika and the Highway was rugged. Now, once across the Yukon, he realized he hadn't yet seen anything. Stubby black spruce grew out of swamps that stretched for endless miles, to rise at last against the foothills of jagged ranges that looked wild and lonely and unbelievably precipitous, even with the foreshortening perspective of their height.

The Little Black was on the far side of those ranges, in a more gently sloping valley where the black spruce gave way in many places to what looked like open meadow. But, as they passed over the barrier cliffs, McQueen began to be a little more convinced that there was something in Joe Douglas' theory. You could hide all the air forces in the world behind these mountains, cached in the natural revetments of these tributary valleys.

The place Mixon picked for them to come down was in one of the valleys, alongside a medium-sized stream which showed turbid and swollen in the sunlight. McQueen took a pass at the strip and saw at once that the approaches were all right and that there was room enough. It all depended on the thickness of that grass and the bearing surface beneath. He had to take Mixon's word for that. So he brought her in and set her down, bumping less than he had expected.

They were then sitting in an open meadow perhaps a half mile wide, running parallel to the stream for at least a mile in either direction. Some kind of people had been there before, often. Axe-marked stumps lined the fringe of the timber and McQueen saw traces of old fires. There was a crashing in the brush and he had a glimpse of a bear that looked bigger than the hides on Mixon's walls.

Mixon said, "Browns are out. We'll allow us an extra hour, one of these times, and knock one off."

"We'll mount a twenty-millimeter on this baby before you get me to show any interest in that!"

McQueen could have slugged himself for that remark with pleasure. Mixon didn't seem to have noticed. McQueen asked quickly, "Well, is this where we pick up our load? Or are we waiting for somebody?"

Mixon wasn't anxious. "Yeah, we're waitin'. Don't worry, they'll be along. They started for here as soon as they heard our engine comin' up the valley."

"Where're they coming from?"

Mixon waved a casual hand at the timber. "They've got a village back in the brush, somewhere. They'll be along."

There were, roughly, fifty of them when they came. Short, broad, flat-faced men with elongated, powerful-looking bodies. McQueen didn't know for sure how he had expected them to be dressed but, whatever he had expected, he was a little startled to see that they were wearing shirts, trousers and pacs which had come out of the same bin as Mixon's. Quite a bit dirtier, and here and there an old mackinaw or a canvas parka, but that was the only difference.

He followed Mixon out of the plane, keeping unobtrusively to his rear, and studied those faces. During the years McQueen had traveled with his missionary father around Japan, he had seen almost every size and description of organism called Japanese, from the hairy men of the north, through the six-foot descendants of Kubla Khan's Mongol raiders on Hokkaido, to the short, quick Malay type of the south. He had seen enough to know that anybody who points at any bandy-legged, flat-faced, buck-toothed biped and says definitely, that man is—or is not—a Jap, is a fool.

He was also enough of an amateur anthropologist to know that the Caspian type, which at some time or other did spread over the islands of Nippon and has exerted considerable influence on the appearance of present-day Japs, was also the racial ancestor of the northern North American Indian.

McQueen ran all that through his mind in the moments immediately after their descent from the ship, while he was following Mixon toward one of the oldest and dirtiest of the Indians. He was trying to convince himself that these men were not Japs. Like Wasilla, they sure as hell looked it.

To the old Indian, Mixon said, "Hello, Pete. How've you been?"

The old man said, "No good. How you?"

"I've been all right. Pete, this is Jerry Mason. Works for me now. Pete Kandik, Mason. He's chief of this tribe."

Old Pete gave Mason one look from hooded black eyes, then returned his attention to Mixon. "Where Wasilla?" he asked. "He no come on this trip?"

Suddenly there was a crashing in the brush and McQueen had a glimpse of a big brown bear.

"Wasilla said he was going to Valdez," Mixon lied easily. "That was a couple of days ago, Pete. I haven't seen him since."

The old man looked at Mixon steadily, the eyes as unwinking as a snake's. Mixon said, "He gave me a pack to bring you. Get it, will you, Mason?"

McQUEEN hauled the pack out of the plane. As he bounced it on the sill while he was climbing down, he heard the unmistakable clink of bottles. Old Pete heard it, too, or he guessed what it was. The eyes left Mixon and fastened on the pack, and he asked no more about Wasilla.

Mixon said, "Got some more fur down, Pete?"

The old man said something over his shoulder, and most of the younger men turned back toward the underbrush. They came out under bales and tied clusters of skins. McQueen didn't know much about fur but he gasped at the sheer bulk of the piles when they heaped it on the ground between Mixon and the old chief.

Mixon said, "We'll just check the bales and the swatches, Pete. Wasilla can sort it out when I get it back."

Kandik shook his head. "We count."

"I've got to be getting back. You know that, Pete."

"We count. You write."

Mixon muttered to himself but he took out a notebook and pencil. McQueen watched, fascinated.

At a word from the old man, one of the Indians unloosened the rawhide lashing of one of the big bales. These skins were round in outline, big as a table-top.

Kandik said, "Prime. Two hands, one hand."

Mixon wrote and said, "All right, prime beaver. Fifty to a bale. How many bales?"

"Two hands."

"O.K., ten bales. Mason, go over and look after stowin' this stuff away when I've checked it off, will you?"

McQueen supervised the loading job. When they were through, the space behind the two seats was filled about tight. Some of the skins, particularly the beaver, were stiff and stowable. The others, some loose, golden furs that were as soft and slippery as quicksilver and some gorgeous black and brown things, packed easily into the spaces.

Even so, McQueen could probably have made a better job of it if he had not been paying major attention to the men who were doing the stowing. He watched them climbing in and out of the airplane, as practiced and sure of themselves as if they had been fooling around planes all of their lives. He caught more than one sharp glance at the instrument panel and the radio.

He took the ship off the rolling meadow, finally, with one thing certain in his mind, at least. Those monkeys might not be Japs but they were the most peculiar damn Indians he had ever heard of.

On the way back, he asked Mixon about one peculiarity. "Offhand, wouldn't you say that those Indians back there were what you might call a little overloaded with shooting irons?"

"You mean the rifles? You saw that bear, didn't you?"

"I guess it was a bear. But those Indians were pretty close to their camp or village, or wherever they hole up, didn't you say? Does every man tote all his artillery every time he goes out of doors?"

"Just about. It's that kind of a country."

Yes, McQueen thought, it might be. For more reasons than one.

Mixon interrupted his thoughts. The big man said sharply, "You're off course, Mason! Swing right!"

After taking off from the valley, McQueen had set a general course west. They were approaching the barrier range at a point, McQueen estimated, about twenty miles south of the gap through which they had come in. Obediently, McQueen banked north and picked a line back to that place.

He asked, "What's the matter—this the only pass? The one ahead looked all right."

"Never mind. Go where I tell you."

McQueen said, "Look, my friend! I'm the pilot of this airplane. If I want to look over country I have to fly often, to see what places there are where I could get down if I should have to, I'm going to do it. Unless you give me a better reason than that."

Mixon relaxed. "Don't get excited. I'm showing you the only safe route to follow through here. There would be no place to land, up that way, except against a mountain."

"Well, that's all I wanted to know." But McQueen looked off to his left, at the ground below the course he had tried to take, and his gaze caught something.

"What about that mine over there? Don't they have a strip?"

Mixon glanced once toward the huddle of buildings at the mouth of a little valley in the far distance which McQueen's trained eyes had picked up. He looked away too quickly, McQueen thought.

He said, "No, there's nothin' over there. Those shacks are practically dug into the side of a cliff."

"Oh? What is it?"

"Old mine, I guess."

McQueen looked no more. "What do they call it?" he asked idly. "Any name?"

"I don't know. I think they called it the Northeastern, or somethin' like that. I'm not even sure they're workin' it any more."

On the way back, McQueen bothered his boss some more. He would have done it out of sheer

boredom, if for no other reason. But he was also curious.

They had cut in behind Circle and were following the highway. McQueen said, "Hell of a lot of fur back there."

"Quite a bit."

"Those Indians trap it all?"

"I expect they did."

"Beaver, too. I thought those things were dying out."

"Some places. Not in here. Though"—Mixon permitted himself a mirthless grin—"they soon will around here, if Pete and his boys keep on findin' somebody to sell 'em to."

MIXON had the notebook on his knee and was covering another page with a hodgepodge of scribbled arithmetic. McQueen paid no obvious attention to that, but he asked, "What's that much fur worth? Or should I ask?"

The big man chuckled. "You can ask if you want to. Worth to who, me or the Indians?"

"Either one."

"Prime beaver—and I guess all of that is prime—is thirty-five to forty-five bucks on the market. And he's got a lot of marten and some fisher there. Also some mink."

"Mink, eh?"

"That's hardly worth the trouble. Mink-farmin' has taken all the price outa that. Also, it's illegal as hell. Only thing is, Pete doesn't know it."

"Anyhow, he's got twenty thousand dollars' worth of beaver back there."

"Maybe ten, twelve—to him."

"And the other stuff?"

"Maybe ten thousand more. Also—to him."

McQueen said sincerely, "My God! How many loads like this will I be bringing out for them?"

Mixon gave him a slantwise look. "You're bringin' what you bring out for *me*. Don't forget that."

"Every time I think of the cut I'm getting out of it, I'll remember all over again," McQueen promised.

His boss grunted. "You're just a hired hand, fella. Don't be forgettin' that, either."

"All right. Anyhow, how much will I be bringing out?"

"Maybe five, six more loads. This is spring, in this country, and Kandik's people are still dribblin' in their last winter's catch."

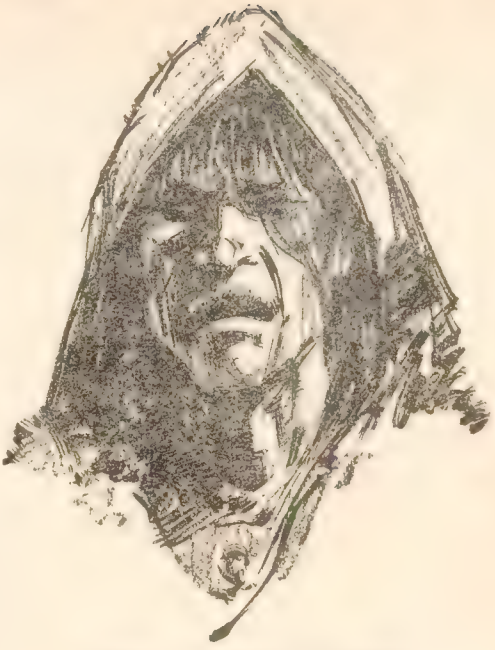
McQueen did some calculating out loud. He said, "That could go well over a hundred thousand dollars."

"It could. Likely will."

"What in hell do a bunch of greasy-chinned Indians buy with a hundred thousand bucks?"

"All sorts of stuff," Mixon told him noncommittally. "They love to cache."

"Yeah," McQueen thought, "I'll bet they do."



"Where's Wasilla?" Kandik asked, his hooded black eyes as unwinking as a snake's. "He no come this trip?"

He could almost feel the excitement building up inside him. There was something to this goose chase, after all. And, not only was the thing being pulled right under American noses, but it was being underwritten—at least in part—by American money paid for illegal American fur. And Americans were helping. He wondered if the Americans knew it.

He was very impatient to get back to earth and in conversation again with the Ladd Field A-2. However, there was one important phase of the mission yet to be performed.

McQueen asked, "What do we do with it, take it back to your joint?"

Mixon shook his head. "Just keep followin' the highway. I'll tell you what comes next."

At a point McQueen estimated to be twenty-five miles short of Fairbanks, Mixon ordered him to swing south. He gave other directions that caused them to follow a great curve south of the town and Ladd Field, then west again. They had been on the new western course a few minutes when Mixon gestured again.

He said, pointing down to the left, "Here's where we unload."

McQueen looked. Fifteen hundred feet below, he saw a cabin in a little clearing. There was the narrow highway cut through heavy forest, a little winding track going into the cabin, and the clearing around the cabin, perhaps fifty yards across.

He said, "Friend, this thing may have auto-

When Mixon heaved, a shower of bales of the precious furs exploded out of the plane door.

gyro attachments underneath the seat but I don't know as I'd know how to put 'em on."

Mixon laughed. "We ain't goin' down. Did you ever do any bombin'?"

McQueen said, "Oh, I see. In the clearing?"

"Close as we can come."

"O.K., open the door. You start heaving when I yell and quit when I yell again."

When Mixon heaved, a shower of bales and bundles exploded out the door. They got rid of the load in five passes over the clearing. The first stick was not too good but, after that, having got the angle at which the things floated down, McQueen was able to do better. He was sure that everything which went out could be picked up without too much trouble.

Not that he cared particularly, this time. But some one of the next times he might be thinking about doing the government an extra good turn by dropping some evidence where it could be easily found.

They flew back to the Mile Post and McQueen set her down on the little grassy strip in the rear without incident. Passing as close as he had dared to Ladd Field, he had seen a P-39, black and businesslike against the setting sun, and it was a temptation to bust over there and turn his passenger and his dope to date over to some bigger people. But the urge passed almost as soon as it had come. He'd been given a job, and all that he could do hadn't yet been done.

Charley and Mikulof took the ship over and rolled it into the barnlike hangar behind the roadhouse. As they walked away, McQueen asked, "When do we go again?"

"Tomorrow," Mixon told him. "They've got it all together up there now. We might as well get it out as fast's we can."

McQueen said, "You told me there were five or six loads. That mean my job is good for about a week?"

"There'll be some freightin' in, all summer."

"Into the same place?"

"Some of it."

McQueen had been leading up to a question that really interested him. "How about tomorrow? Do I have to go in alone or are you going along again?"

Mixon said shortly, "I'll tell you tomorrow. But I'll probably be going."

CHAPTER V

RED-EYE OVERLOOKS A CORPSE

THAT night, the Mile Post was as jammed as ever. McQueen had learned to recognize a few faces amongst present Fairbanks inhabitants and he saw nearly every one of them again. Even Red-eye Jameson appeared.

McQueen was in his usual corner near the bar. Red-eye said, "Hi, theah, son! What aboot a drink?"

"It's an idea. Let's go sit down."

They carried drinks around the sardine-can dance floor, peering into booths. There was none empty. McQueen said, "Well, hell! Let's go look in the office."

Mixon's office was empty. McQueen closed the door and took the chair behind the desk. Jameson grinned and pulled another from the corner. McQueen said, "Well, the first today!"

Jameson took a swallow, then looked surprised. "The fust today? You been wastin' a lot uh time!"

"No, but I haven't had much drinking time. I've been out of town a little way."

Red-eye showed polite interest. "That so? Wheahaboots?"

"Little Black River."

Jameson looked instantly at the door, then at the room's one window. As on the previous night, the deafening din in the outer part of the building was as perfect a sound screen as a mile of distance would have been. Jameson evidently realized that, for his eyes came back to rest noncommittally on the ceiling.

He said, "Yuh don't say. Lookin' ovuh that mine you asked aboot?"

"From a distance. But I'm not talking about mining tonight."

"No? What then?"

"Fur."

That brought Jameson's eyes down in a hurry. McQueen met their piercing stare squarely and felt considerable relief. Jameson said quietly, "Did you say 'fur'?"

"I said fur. Illegal fur. Hot fur. Dirty fur."

Jameson looked about the room again, slowly, but this time it was only for effect. "Ain't you talkin' pretty loose, son? Seein' where you're doin' the talkin'—and who you might be talkin' to?"

"I'm not much worried. I think you're interested. Aren't you?"

Jameson thought it over. At length, he said, "I'm interested. What made you guess I might be?"

"I don't think people take such a hell of an interest in total strangers for nothing. Even in Alaska."

"Well, they do, son. You took a long chance, if that was all you had to go on. But you guessed right. What are you—Army Intelligence?"

McQueen nodded. "And you?"

"The Bureau."

McQueen looked puzzled. Jameson said, "Bureau of Indian Affairs. What did you think I was, FBI?"

McQueen admitted it. Jameson laughed. He said, "I can do you just as much good. More, maybe. I can afford to overlook something the G-men might not think they could."

"What would that be?"

"A dead Indian. Used to be called Joe Wasilla."

It was McQueen's turn to stare. He said finally, "So you knew about that, did you?"

"Sure."

McQueen reviewed last night's events. Try as he would to double-check his memory, he was still sure that Jameson had been somewhere around the Mile Post bar when he and Morse Mixon had walked out into it, just after Mixon had sent the clean-up detail into town. And he didn't see how Jameson could have known of it before he had ridden to the Mile Post with McQueen himself.

"How did you know?"

"I saw Mikulof pick him up in the alley."

"When?"

"Two seconds after you dropped him."

McQueen was startled. "The hell you say! Then Mikulof was with him?"

"Waiting for him in the alley."

"Then where did Mikulof take him? Here?"

Jameson nodded. McQueen said, slowly, "So Mixon knew about that even before we showed up out here, did he? He'd sent Mikulof to wait in the alley. Maybe it wasn't Wasilla they expected to bring back here."

"Maybe not. Maybe it was only that they didn't know what Wasilla might run into."

"Yes, but—what did Mixon suspect me of? Who did he think I might be?"

Jameson chuckled, mirthlessly. "Mixon knows that there's an Indian Affairs man in the neighborhood. He's doubtless lookin' for it to be a stranger."

"Yes. I get it. Well, it looks as if we two are

sniffing around the same tree, for one reason or another. We can do each other some good. That's what I was leading up to—asking you for some help."

"I expected so," Jameson agreed equably. "Howevuh, you can still do me a favuh or two before you even up for me keepin' shut about Wasilla."

"I guess that's right. Still, if I'm to tell you how those furs are getting out, I'll have to have one thing from you."

"I might stretch a point. What do you want?"

"I want you to take a message to Ladd Field for me."

Jameson nodded. "That's not much trouble. You plan to write somethin'?"

"No. You go to the Field in the morning and tell Captain Gilbert—if you can't find Gilbert, tell the C.O., nobody less—where I'm going tomorrow. Tell him how to get there."

"Wheah will that be, the Northeastern?"

"That's right. And tell him to come combat-loaded."

JAMESON looked into his empty glass and studied the bottom for a moment. He said, "I'll tell him. I'll tell him somethin' else, and you, too. I don't know what you're up to an' I'm not doin' any more guessin' than is good for me. Still, I shouldn't wonder but what you'd like to know that those Indians up there on the Little Black are about half Japanese."

"Half Japanese! What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. A lot of Japs went in there years ago and settled down. They intermarried with those Kandiks. Now, you can't hardly tell a Kandik from a Jap and likewise."

McQueen breathed, "Good Lord! Don't people know that?"

"I know it. I just told you. But it's the kind of story that nobody believes, even when they know it's true. It's true."

"Well," McQueen said, after a bit, "that is interesting. It certainly is. You heard what I said about 'combat-loaded,' didn't you?"

"I heard it. I'll even make a strong suggestion that your big young lieutenant friend goes along with his jump-soldiers."

McQueen thought of something. He said, "That reminds me. You were telling me I was a lucky guesser. How did *you* happen to guess that I was on an Army Intelligence job?"

Jameson chuckled. "That was no guess. I was told."

"You were told! Who the hell told you?" McQueen blurted.

"The little Rogness girl."

McQueen stared, speechless. Jameson took pity on him. "She's one o' your friend Captain Gilbert's people. She spotted you in here and went to work on you the minute she saw you. How she figured or what she saw, I dunno. But she did."

"Then that whole business with the dough-boy lieutenant that night—it was all framed?"

"Not all of it. I don't think she expected to see her boy-friend get flattened as quick as that. I understand she has agreed to marry that young feller. She was after you like a burr on your tail after that happened."

"Good Lord!" McQueen breathed. "The air is considerably full of funny business in these parts, isn't it?"

"It sho' is," Jameson agreed. "Seems to me I've heerd there's a war on. And it ain't so powerful far from here."

"Yes," McQueen said, "I've heard the same rumor. Well, let's get out of here, now that we've got our business done, before Mixon comes in and starts throwing that weight of his around prematurely."

"You may have your business well in hand," Jameson told him plaintively, "but I'm not doin' so well, myse'f."

McQueen stared, then laughed. He said, "Excuse me," and told Jameson about the fur and the cabin on the highway. Then they had a last drink at the bar.

Jameson wandered off to talk to somebody. McQueen was glad of the opportunity to do some thinking. The first thing that occurred to him was that he wasn't so bad at this undercover business, after all. It looked as if he were in a fair way toward doping out this set-up and he had yet to get the information and assistance from Gilbert which Joe Douglas had promised would be forthcoming. He remembered what Douglas had said to him, that day in Washington. "Gilbert thinks he can put you onto the man whose trail might lead into this deal."

He snorted at the idea of how much help Gilbert had been to him. Then he thought of something else. He hadn't been in Fairbanks one day before somebody had pointed him at Morse Mixon. Aasie had done that. The next day, Jameson had moved into the picture and he had actually delivered him in front of Mixon.

McQueen guessed, a little ruefully, that he had had more help than he had realized. Jameson had even been practically outside the door during the Wasilla incident. McQueen figured, however, that he could probably take a little credit for handling that, himself.

Just then, he saw Aasie. She passed through the bar on her way to the dance-hall with a man whom McQueen didn't know, and he watched them find a booth. He couldn't resist making an opportunity to return a little ribbing.

So he walked over to the booth and asked the man, "Mind if I dance with Aasie?"

The stranger looked at him and shrugged. "Up to her."

Aasie said, "Hello, Jerry," and came out.

When they were in the midst of the mob,

McQueen had to bend until his lips were near her ear. He asked, "Where's the Army? Couldn't he think of any more questions to ask your pop?"

"Guess not. Maybe he's left town."

"Oh? I might see him. I'm leaving tomorrow myself."

"Are you, Jerry? Not for good?"

"I hope it's for some good. Anyhow, do you suppose Riggsy and I might be going the same way?"

"I don't know. Which way are you going?"

"Oh, northeastern a piece."

She pulled back and looked at him. Then she said, "What was it I said the first night I saw you—that they had another big mouth in Alaska?"

"That was it," he agreed. "I guess I just can't help it. But, while it gets me into trouble, sometimes it gets me out, too."

"I doubt that this is one of the times."

"Maybe not. But I hoped that the lieutenant might be going my way. I feel bad, not giving him a good chance to have that talk he wanted last night."

She looked up at him again and smiled. But her eyes were serious. She said, "Well, if I see him, I'll tell him."

McQueen said, "Do that. And you try to see him."

CHAPTER VI

CRASH LANDING

WHEN he took the Beechcraft off the next morning, Mixon beside him, the remembrance of that was considerable help. With both Jamesson and Aasie carrying the message to Ladd Field, he felt fairly safe. Between the two of them, something ought to be pretty sure to get to Gilbert.

On the way out, he edged unobtrusively closer to Ladd Field. Mixon growled irritably and McQueen swung away, but not until he had seen at least two fat-bellied C-53s sitting on the apron. That made him feel even better.

Most of the rest of the trip in was uneventful. Morse Mixon, today, was more uncommunicative than usual and that reduced his conversation to practically a minus quantity. It gave McQueen time to think, had he had much to think about, which he didn't. His plan was, at the beginning, simplicity itself and after that he expected to improvise as he went along.

As far as his plan went, it was merely to make one good pass at the Northeaster "mine," down low enough to get a good look at it. Then, if it seemed to be what he was looking for, and his luck held, he'd simply high-tail back to Ladd Field with the information. If there were Jap Air Force planes and pilots there or in the vicinity, and they were enough on the ball to get one of those old Nakajimas into the air and on his tail before he could take distance, there would be two things he could do.

He might be able, by making use of the Beechcraft's slower speed and general stodginess, to hug the ground and out-fly a Jap or two long enough to suck them back within range of Ladd and the fighters. Or, if that didn't turn out to be healthy, he planned to crash-land on the first flat or sand-bar and trust to the radio.

He didn't imagine Mixon would take all this sitting still. But McQueen banked on the fact that a non-flying passenger couldn't throw too much weight around the cabin of an airplane in the air. Too, he still had the .380.

To keep Mixon quiet as long as possible, he scrupulously avoided Circle and crossed the barrier range through the gap Mixon had shown him. When he then swung south to follow the range up to the strip near the river where the Indians were waiting, he edged unobtrusively off course to his right, angling in closer to the mountains and toward the place he had seen the buildings.

Mixon noticed it, after a little. He growled, "You're headin' too far west."

McQueen said, "Sorry," and kicked his tail around with rudder alone. The compass rolled a dew degrees east, then came back as McQueen let up on the controls.

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Mixon sat up. He said, "I told you to get back on course. What the hell goes on?"

At that moment, McQueen got the glimpse of huddled buildings that he had been straining for. He also had a fleeting sight of something else—a tiny glint of sun on a far-off wing, miles to the south. He didn't get a chance to take a better look.

Iron-like fingers clamped on the back of his neck. Mixon said, "I don't know what this is, but I don't like it, fella. Turn east!"

McQueen sat back and grinned, as well as he could. That grip on his neck was no joke, but the brown buildings were coming at them at about two miles a minute.

He said, "You don't like the way I fly, do it yourself."

"No, fella," Mixon told him, half-whispering. "I'm not goin' to have to do that."

The fingers shifted until Mixon's left thumb was underneath McQueen's jaw and the pressure increased. McQueen began to black out almost immediately. He supposed that it was a carotid artery that Mixon was shutting off.

The fingers let up. Mixon said, "See, fella? Now you fly this airplane to where it's supposed to go. Then we'll see what this is all about."

It looked as if it had reduced itself to his chance with the gun and it was now or never for even that. McQueen whipped his hand away from the wheel and thrust at his armpit to get it.

He had been flying too many years and too many things you did in the air were second-nature reflexes for him to be able to take his attention entirely away from the plane. In the very instant that he reached, his eye was automatically checking the attitude of the ship in the dive they were beginning and the look of the approaching ground.

That glance at the ground startled him so that he checked the movement for the gun for an instant, in spite of himself. And it lost him his chance to use it. Mixon threw his other arm across McQueen's body and caught his wrist as he pulled the pistol free. Mixon twisted sharply once and McQueen was helpless.

McQueen had hardly felt it. He gasped, "Mixon! Look! Dammit, man, look!"

THEY were still five miles short of the mine buildings, angling steeply down across a flat little valley with steep, eroded sides. A wide, slow stream that looked shallow came straight down the center. Their course was taking them across the stream and toward the southern rim, midway between two of the tributary canyons.

It was the steep hillside between those two canyons at which McQueen was staring. There was nothing there but bare, grass-grown, all but precipitous cliff. He could see that all right—the grass and the unbroken contour of the ground. Nevertheless, *behind* the surface of the ground was the definite, unmistakable outline of an aircraft, a fairly big aircraft, at that. It was head-on to them and looked as if the wings would span about fifty feet.

Sure, he was crazy. Or maybe those killing fingers of Mixon's, still at his throat, were making him see things. And the cliff was rushing at them and he had to pull up over it or he wouldn't have much longer to worry over anything, neither Mixon nor goofy ghost airplanes silhouetted against the side of a solid mountain.

So he pulled up and over, dizzily, with his one free hand. Mixon's grip on his neck relaxed a little and the big man grated, "Now fly this thing, you son! I want you on the ground, but quick!"

McQueen found he could talk a little, hoarsely. He said, "Sure, and the same to you. Hang onto your hat, you big ape!"

He let go the wheel with his free hand and closed his throttle all the way. The engine spat and died and the nose fell away again. Mixon, with hands full of McQueen, could do nothing but curse, and that much he did, with feeling.

They were passing over, and now falling off toward the broad, rounded top of the ridge. It was fairly smooth and open. Not smooth enough for a landing but good enough for what McQueen had in mind.

He turned the wheel loose again long enough to crack his throttle once. That let him pull the nose up before he cut the switch and slammed the old ship down, tail-skid touching first, into a clump of scrubby trees. He shoved the wheel away from him and threw his arm across his face, relaxing against the crash.

She hit with a ripping thud and a crunch, her nose flailing down and her tail whipping up. McQueen thought for a fleeting instant that they were going over on their back, but the idling prop bit and turned her half sidewise and she finally settled back on even keel.

He wasn't too sure until the plane came completely to rest just how he had made out himself. At the same moment he realized that he was all right, it came to him suddenly that Mixon was not and that both his neck and right arm were free. And he still had the pistol.

Mixon was half folded forward and motionless. McQueen did not see blood, and so, making certain that the pistol was free and ready—and out of Mixon's easy reach—he pulled the big man back into his seat to look him over. There was an angry bruise on Mixon's cheekbone beside his right eye, but McQueen could see no other evidence of damage. That was probably the result of bopping his head against the instrument panel, and McQueen supposed that it would take more than that to count this bird out for very long.

He was right. Mixon's head rolled and wobbled upright while McQueen was still weighing

the relative advantages of getting away from the wreck while the other was still out against the possibility that Mixon might have some kind of a firearm in the ship which he would have to be kept from getting his hands on.

McQueen jabbed the pistol muzzle hard into the man's back, well away from the possible reach of his hands, and said easily, "All right, Mixon? Then see if you can open the door. And don't make any wrong moves."

The big man shook his head, felt of his swelling cheek, and twisted his body around toward the door without a word. The door didn't open easily and McQueen was afraid that that was going to create a tough situation. But Mixon's shoulders heaved once and the jammed door burst open.

MIXON climbed out and McQueen followed him. Mixon moved away a few steps and stopped to stare at the twisted wreck of the Beechcraft.

He said, dully, "Well, there went four thousand dollars' worth of airplane. An' we're stuck about four thousand miles from no place. Do I at least get to hear what the hell you did it for?"

McQueen could afford to be cheerful. He had the gun. He told Mixon, "I don't know as I can tell you all that. But I'll tell you what comes next. We are going back over the other side of this hill and find out what makes the side of a mountain look like it's full of airplane."

Mixon stared at him without comprehension. He shook his head and asked, sarcastically, "Then what?"

"Then we will go take a look at this Northeastern Mine, maybe."

"So that's it."

"That's it."

"Why?"

McQueen said, thoughtfully, watching him, "I'm afraid that's got to be none of your business, Mixon. I don't trust you. Under the circumstances, I ought to be able to, but I don't."

"Nobody asked you to, chum. I said I thought I had some information comin' but I ain't interested in what you say. You go over to the mine, you go by yourself."

"If I go by myself," McQueen promised him grimly, "it'll be because you're not in shape to walk. Now let's get the hell over the hill in this other direction and take a look. Get going, Mixon."

Mixon, after some consideration, decided to go and moved off, McQueen a few steps behind him. He kept his attention carefully on the broad back in front of him but he nevertheless got some fast thinking done.

He probably should have checked that radio before he left the ship. He might have use for it. Still there were good arguments against doing it. It would take time to get in touch with Ladd Field, not knowing the frequencies they'd be monitoring. He didn't have the time, nor could he risk being picked up by any station which might be in this vicinity. He had to come back here anyway, there being no place else he knew of to go with any information he might get. He could check the radio then and, if it wasn't working, there was always the gas left in the ship to burn for a beacon.

Past that point there was no use in thinking. Ahead of him, Mixon was having trouble with the uneven footing. He lurched and stumbled once or twice. Finally he went down. McQueen thought that the man's head was probably not too clear yet and that he would undoubtedly feel better shortly. So he stopped and waited for Mixon to get up.

He didn't, however. McQueen said, "Come on, Mixon. Quit stalling. We got country to cover."

There was no answer. The big man was crumpled forward, half on his face, and McQueen had to walk around him to see him. As he did so, Mixon's kick caught him behind the knee and upset him neatly.

Even as he fell and tried desperately to roll clear and back to his feet, he knew he wouldn't make it. Mixon was too fast and there was too much strength in those big hands. He caught McQueen by an arm and an ankle, snifted the hand on his arm to his wrist and took the pistol away from him as easily as from a child.

When he had the pistol, he stood away and watched McQueen get up. His eyes were bleak but otherwise the broad face was expressionless again.

He said, "O.K., fella. Now let's hear more talkin'."

McQueen said wearily, "Yeah, I guess we'll have to do some talking. All right. I'm an Army pilot, Mixon. I was detailed to find a Jap air base back in this country somewhere."

Mixon's surprise seemed genuine. "A Jap air base! Who the hell's pipedream was that?"

"Maybe it wasn't a pipedream. What's at the Northeastern Mine, Mixon?"

"Nothin' that's any of my business. Nor yours."

McQueen stared at him. "You're an American, aren't you, Mixon? You may be a lousy fur-thief but you're still an American. And your country's at war. Fur-smuggling and treason are two different things, or don't you think so?"

Mixon said calmly, "Mindin' my own business is even more different. That's somethin' I understand. I aim to keep right on doin' it."

"Mixon, tell me one thing. Are there some Japs around that mine over there?"

"I wouldn't know about that, fella. There's some people over there that I do business with. They pay attention strictly to that business and so do I. That's all I know."

PLAYING for time to dope out his next move, McQueen shrugged helplessly. He asked, "Well, you've you've got the gun. What do we do next?"

"We start walkin'."

"Where to?"

"Over to meet Old Pete and his people."

"Then what?"

"Then we'll see. Maybe he'll take us down-river to Fort Yukon."

McQueen shook his head. "I guess I had you figured wrong, Mixon. I didn't take you for that kind of a cold-blooded murdering heel."

"Who said murder?"

"Do you mean that you're going to tell Pete that we crashed up here by accident? No, Mixon. There's no percentage for you in letting me ever get out. You're right about that. But you're making one mistake. A hell of a mistake."

"What's that?"

"You think you're going to tell Pete that I killed Wasilla and then crashed you up here. You'll probably tell him that I'm a Bureau man, looking for illegal fur."

Mixon said, "I might. An' it might even be true."

"That would be the mistake, Mixon. And about your last one, too. Because if you told Old Pete that Wasilla was dead, you might find yourself going down the river but it wouldn't be in any boat. Wasilla was no Indian, Mixon. He was a Jap agent."

Mixon considered that. At length, he said, "What's your idea?"

"We'll check the bluff over here and see what in hell it was I saw behind the side of that mountain. Then we'll take a look at this mine, from a distance. After that, we'll get on the radio in your plane and have some of the boys from Ladd Field come and get us. They'll take a closer look at things around here, while they're doing it."

Mixon had evidently been mulling it over while McQueen was talking. He said, almost at once, "I think you talk too fast. All that you say could happen, just the way you say it, except that the last act would be Morse Mixon answerin' a few hard questions about a little fur. You see, the catch is, there ain't no Jap air base around here. So it's all horse-feathers and we better go see Pete. Get goin', Mason."

Oh, well, McQueen thought, I was doing pretty fair, up to a certain point. But the weak mind threw me. Now I don't think the strong back is going to be strong enough, either.

But he had to try. He said, "Nope, we're going over the hill, Mixon. You haven't got the guts to shoot me. You've been having fun with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U. S. Marshal for quite a while, but you've got more sense than to take on the U. S. Army. Throw away the gat and get ready to argue about it."

He stepped toward the big man, spreading his feet and feeling the ground underneath. Mixon lifted the pistol for one half-hearted instant, then grinned wolfishly and threw it away.

McQueen's hands were faster and he had a few inches reach. His left cracked sharply against Mixon's face, but too high. He threw a right straight in behind it, seeing it miss, too, but land half against the purplish bruise beside Mixon's eye.

That made the broad man grunt, and he pulled his thick neck in even farther. McQueen had stepped back the moment he let the right hand go, knowing that he couldn't last three minutes in the circle of those thick arms.

Surprisingly, though, Mixon wasn't reaching. He was going to fight him, and the knowledge was the first ray of hope McQueen had seen. He watched carefully and waited.

Mixon came in slowly and stubbornly, his thick arms high. McQueen snapped his head back an inch or two with another left and Mixon tried to hook to the body underneath it. The hook was short but where it barely brushed his ribs, McQueen felt as if the bones had been laid bare.

However, it showed him one way to get something done. So he led the left again and pitched another right, aiming lower and driving from his heels. He connected squarely on Mixon's jaw just ahead of his ear and he could feel that it would do.

He had just the instant which allowed him to know that, before something no smaller than a five-hundred-pounder exploded against his middle. The only sensation he felt other than breathlessness was that the ground had dissolved beneath his feet and dropped him into a black, bottomless well. When he was tired of feeling himself drop, he passed out.

CHAPTER VII

THE GHOST PLANE

IT WAS a movement which twisted a spearhead of agony deep in his left side that brought him to. There was bright, unwelcome light in his eyes when he opened them and so he shut them again and experimented a little with that pain. As his mind came back into focus a little, he decided it was probably a cracked rib causing it. He thought that perhaps he could investigate it by feel and discovered that he had no hands! At least, he couldn't use them.

That opened his eyes with a jerk. He was lying on hard-packed dirt, against a rough plank wall. He could see that much. He couldn't see his hands because they seemed to be fastened behind him—painfully fastened, he learned when he tried to move them. He also

learned that there was something wrong with his head. It felt as if half of it were missing and in place of the missing part, someone had fastened a huge weight that bore down with crushing pressure whenever he moved.

The light was coming from a single dirty window, high up in the opposite wall of the room. A shaft of sun was forcing its way through directly in his face. Shifting to avoid it, his eyes moved across another blank wall and a solid wooden door. Then he saw Mixon.

Mixon was also sitting flat on the dirt, his hands hidden behind him. He was conscious and watching McQueen. When he saw McQueen move, he spoke.

"Fella, what did you say you thought was goin' on around this place?"

"What place?" McQueen muttered thickly.

"This Northeastern Mine."

"I—don't know. Is that where we are?"

"That's where we are."

"How'd we get here?"

"Well, I come to first, back there on the ridge, and—"

"Oh, so I clipped you, did I?"

Mixon grunted. "You clipped me. I don't mind sayin' that that don't happen very often, if it's any pleasure to you."

"It is," McQueen assured him. "It makes me feel much better. Incidentally, speaking of how I feel, who bopped me on the head?"

"These so-and-so's that put us here. You come to kind of restless and one of them whacked you with a rifle barrel. He hit you a pretty solid clunk. Tell the truth, I didn't know whether you was comin' back at all, after that one."

McQueen said, "I hope you'll know him when you see him again. Well, go on."

"I was sayin', I come to and was just shakin' my head, tryin' to figure out what to do next and what to do with you while I was doin' it, when I see what looks like about a dozen of Old Pete's people comin' up the slope. They had heard us crash."

"Which way did they come from?"

"Well, they come from where you was talkin' about seein' the airplane beside the hill. What the hell was that all about, anyway?" Mixon demanded.

"I don't know yet. What about these people of Pete's?"

"I said they *looked* like Pete's people. They come up and I told them we had cracked up and you'd been hurt. They wanted to know what we was doin' way over here. I said we had engine trouble and got off course. I told 'em never mind the conversation, I'd tell it to Pete. But these monkeys didn't act right."

"Had you ever seen any of them before?" asked Mc Queen.

"I dunno if I had or not. At first, I thought so. Now, I wouldn't swear to anything."

"What happened then?"

"I said I wanted to see Pete and bluffed 'em a little. But they weren't havin' any of that. One of 'em said something like, 'You sneakin' around here to see things. We see you don't go away again!' Anyhow, to make it short, they jumped me, tied us both up and lugged us down here to the mine."

McQueen said, "Well, well. Mixon, what do you think now about the chances that some of those people are Japs?"

"I think the chances are pretty good," Mixon told him, briefly. "Admittin' that, now suppose you tell me how we get out from this deadfall. You bein' the cause of us gettin' into it. Are you really workin' for the Army?"

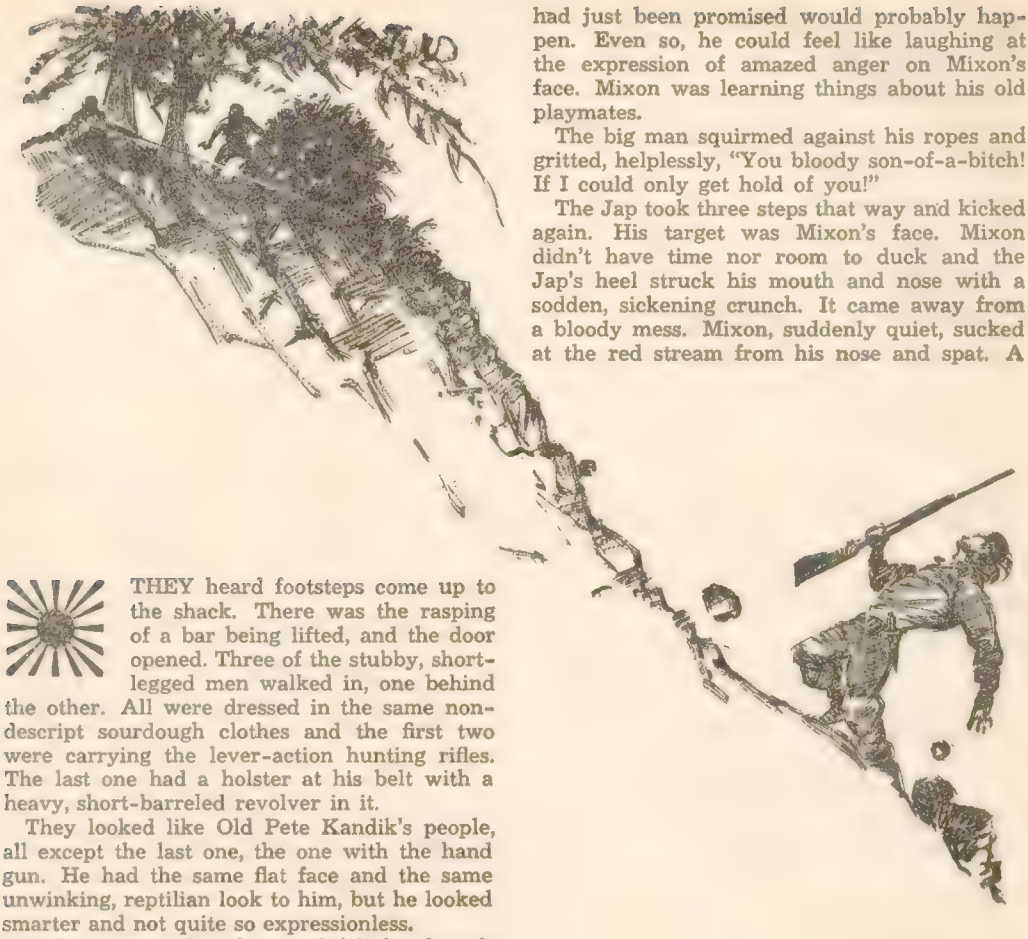
"That's right. And they'll be after us, sooner or later. The only thing is, it might be too much later, for us. These guys probably play it tough."

Mixon tried to move his arms and grimaced. "You c'n leave off the 'probably.'"

"So the next thing for us to figure is how we can get word to the Army to move on in, but quick."

"How would we go about doin' that, startin' from where we are right now?"

"That is something," McQueen admitted. "The best chance I had was the radio in the airplane. That doesn't look very good, at the moment."



THEY heard footsteps come up to the shack. There was the rasping of a bar being lifted, and the door opened. Three of the stubby, short-legged men walked in, one behind the other. All were dressed in the same nondescript sourdough clothes and the first two were carrying the lever-action hunting rifles. The last one had a holster at his belt with a heavy, short-barreled revolver in it.

They looked like Old Pete Kandik's people, all except the last one, the one with the hand gun. He had the same flat face and the same unwinking, reptilian look to him, but he looked smarter and not quite so expressionless.

McQueen stared at him and felt his breath stop and his punished stomach lift. There was almost no doubt about this one. He was a Jap, and a mean one. All Jap, in other words.

He stood there in the middle of the floor and looked them over, in turn. He gave Mixon only a second's inspection and then turned his attention to McQueen.

He said, "Oh, yes-s. The one with the sore belly. How is it now?"

Taking one quick step closer, he kicked McQueen just underneath his left armpit. When the black, rocking waves of pain had subsided a little and McQueen's eyes would focus again, he saw that the animal was watching him with interest. The two stooges with the rifles were amused, but the one who had kicked him wasn't bothering with that.

He said, "I think that you have some broken ribs. If I do that again—many times again—they will puncture the lungs. Then you will not be able to talk at all. S-so you had better talk now."

McQueen agreed to himself that those ribs were undoubtedly broken, and that what he had just been promised would probably happen. Even so, he could feel like laughing at the expression of amazed anger on Mixon's face. Mixon was learning things about his old playmates.

The big man squirmed against his ropes and gritted, helplessly, "You bloody son-of-a-bitch! If I could only get hold of you!"

The Jap took three steps that way and kicked again. His target was Mixon's face. Mixon didn't have time nor room to duck and the Jap's heel struck his mouth and nose with a sodden, sickening crunch. It came away from a bloody mess. Mixon, suddenly quiet, sucked at the red stream from his nose and spat. A

From the hilltop, McQueen squeezed one off at the nearest man and watched him roll.

tooth rolled across the hard-packed dirt with a faint rattling sound.

"You will not be able to talk, al-s-so," the Jap told him, grinning, "unless you begin quickly. What were you doing here?"

McQueen said as evenly as he could manage, "I did not know the way very well and I was lost. I tried to follow the stream and did not get the plane high enough over the ridge."

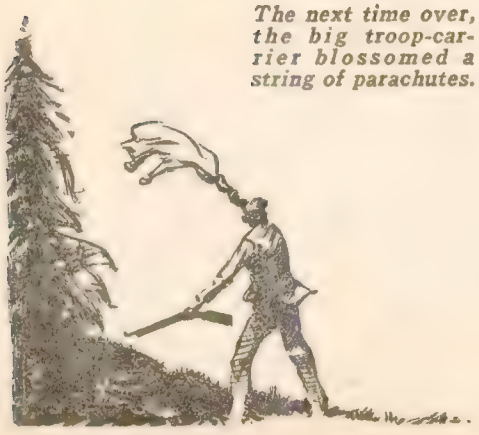
The Jap kicked him in the side again. This time, McQueen was longer coming back. When he did, the kind of a man was waiting. "Now you stop telling lies, perhaps-s? I kick harder next time, perhaps-s."

McQueen thought it was funny that he hadn't noticed before. The brown leather thing shoved carelessly into the Jap's jacket pocket was an old-fashioned flyer's helmet, fitted with earphones and a trailing plug.

He did the only thing he could think of. Letting his head roll and his jaw drop slackly, he slumped back against the wall. He got kicked again, of course——twice—but it really wasn't much of an effort to take it without a yelp or a movement. He had taken so much that what was happening to him had ceased to seem real. He didn't even feel it much.

After the second kick, they watched him doubtfully for a minute or two. The weasel with the revolver said, finally, in Japanese, "We will leave them until Lieutenant Jochu returns. The less big one looks as if he might die very soon, if we continue to persuade him. And it is possible that they were merely lost."

The next time over, the big troop-carrier blossomed a string of parachutes.



They went out and the bar rasped again outside the door. McQueen opened one eye and looked at Mixon. The big man wasn't pretty. His lips were swelling and he had stopped licking at the blood from his smashed nose. His eyes, though, were the worst. Red and glaring, they were hardly human.

"I never saw anything like that done to a man," Mixon muttered thickly. "I never really felt like killing a man before, either."

McQUEEN was pretty sure that he had heard three sets of feet walk away from the shack. He took a chance and whispered, "Only chance we've got is to get loose. I've been trying but they've got me tied too tight. I can't do anything with my left arm, anyway. How about you? Feel like you might work some slack in your rope?"

Mixon stared at him blankly for a moment. Then he dropped his head forward between his knees and McQueen saw his elbows raise up and outward an inch or two. The jacket across the big man's bowed shoulders bulged sharply once and there was a faint snap behind him. His hands came away free, three or four turns of half-inch rope about each wrist.

A Jap is never quite smart enough, McQueen thought. There's probably a half a mile of wire lying around this joint but they had to try to tie that rhinoceros with *rope*, thank God!

Mixon sat looking at his hands and flexing the circulation back into his thick fingers. McQueen said sharply, "Mixon! Come here and see what you can do with these!"

That brought him out of it. He clambered slowly to his feet, looking more than ever like a wounded bear, and came to McQueen. He pushed the pilot out of the way as gently as he could and set to work on his bindings. They were simple and McQueen was free in a minute or two.

He got stiffly to his feet and found that his legs, at least, seemed to be all right. He was dizzy enough but he leaned against the wall until things stopped spinning and made himself believe that he was going to last.

He looked down at his wrist but his watch was gone. "Thieving little bastards!" he muttered. "What time of day do you think it is?"

Mixon said, "Afternoon some time, I guess. You were out quite a while."

McQueen considered. There was the door and the window. The door was barred on the outside and the window was pretty high. He doubted if he could get up to it, in the shape he was in. Estimating Mixon's girth, he didn't think the big man could get through, no matter where it was.

That left the door. He asked, "Mixon, what's the lay of the land outside? Where's the nearest cover we could get into and how far would we have to go?"

Mixon was making sense again. He thought that over, then picked up a splinter and traced a little square on the dirt floor.

He said, "That's this shack. I was watchin' while they walked me in here and I think I got it pretty straight. Over here, about sixty or seventy yards, is the main bunkhouse. In the opposite direction, about the same distance, are the mine buildings—five or six of them, I think. There's another little shack just in back of us and the hill starts right there. It's pretty steep for about three hundred feet. In front, the valley slopes down and there isn't much of anything except a lot of old junk."

McQueen remembered something. "No place for a landing strip?"

Mixon shook his head. "Not that I saw. If they got one, it's not right here."

McQueen said, "Oh, well. . . . We've got other things to worry about at the moment, I guess."

He studied the layout on the floor. "That doesn't look so good, does it? The way I feel, I'd do a lot better going down hill. But they could run us down like sheep in the open. Up the mountain would be the best but we'd never make that unless we had some way of delaying them."

"I'll delay them permanent, do I get my hands on 'em," Mixon promised grimly.

"That's the trouble. What we'd have to do can't be done by hand. No, there's only one thing for us, the way I see it. And that's taking quite a chance."

"What's that?"

"Wait until they come in again and try to get a couple of those rifles. They were ignorant enough to bring them in once, maybe they'll do it again."

Mixon said only, "Whatever you say, fella. You're the Army."

"All right. Get down again over there and put your hands behind you. We'll do the best we can with the first break we get."

McQueen also settled himself against the wall in the same position and put his arms back behind him. It was uncomfortable but that left arm was stiffening and he was afraid he might not be able to get it back there quickly enough when someone came.

Waiting was hard to do. It probably wasn't nearly as long as it seemed until footsteps again approached the door and they heard the rasp of the bar being lifted. McQueen let his head loll and closed his eyes to the faintest slits through which he could still see.

THERE were four of them this time. The first three came in in the same procession and McQueen guessed that the fourth, a slender, slightly more intelligent-looking Jap, was Lieutenant Jochu.

The sergeant with the pistol opened proceedings as before, by aiming a kick at McQueen's body. In the instant that the Jap first moved, McQueen decided that he couldn't take another one of those kicks and that, anyway, they might as well gamble now as later.

He threw his body sidewise, catching the Jap's flying heel in his right hand as he did so. He jerked and both the man's feet went high. He came down on his back on the concrete-like dirt and it knocked him breathless long enough for McQueen to lunge forward and smash his good fist into his face. His head bounced back against the floor and he was quiet.

McQueen had had to concentrate on the job in hand but he'd seen from the tail of his eye big Mixon come boiling out of his corner like a charging bear. The three startled Japs in the middle of the room might just as well have been in there with an enraged grizzly. The damage wouldn't have been much greater.

For some reason, they didn't seem to be able to react at all. They froze in place and didn't move a muscle until Mixon hit them. Two of them he carried with him to crash against the wall, knocking the third—the lieutenant—off balance as they passed. The two hit the wall, with Mixon's two hundred and thirty pounds behind them, and slumped to the floor forthwith. Mixon bent down and slugged each of them once with either hand and they didn't move again.

The lieutenant staggered against a side wall, caught himself and recovered enough to tug at the pistol in his belt. McQueen took him in charge.

When he finished, the lieutenant crumpled like a sack to join the others on the floor.

McQueen had never moved faster in his life. He snatched the lieutenant's pistol, jerked the sergeant's revolver from his belt and threw it to Mixon, then picked up one of the rifles.

He snapped at Mixon, "Get that other rifle! See if one of these monkeys is carrying any matches. Set fire to that junk in the corner while I take a look around. Get going!"

Mixon jumped and McQueen left him to it. He pushed the door open a crack and put his eye to it. What he could see was laid out very nearly exactly as Mixon had described it. They had about fifty yards to go to reach the thick brush on the hillside. He could see one man moving around the big building Mixon had called the bunkhouse. There was no one else in sight.

Mixon said, "O.K. She's burning."

McQueen looked over his shoulder. The flames from the little pile of rubbish were already a couple of feet high. He said, "Good. Knock out that window and let's get going. Follow me but spread when we get to the brush."

He threw the door open and dug for the hill and the brush, Mixon pounding along behind. McQueen heard a shrill yell from the direction of the bunkhouse and a chorus of them a second

or two later. But there wasn't a shot until long after they were into cover.

Three minutes later, at the top of the first rise, McQueen hit the ground and squirmed until he had a position overlooking the slope. There was a lot of indiscriminate shooting from the mine yard and three or four men were just beginning to start up the hill.

The range was a good four hundred yards from the bottom of the hill. McQueen squeezed one off at the man highest up the slope and watched him roll, with pleased curiosity.

He called, "Mixon?" and heard the big man answer from fifty or so yards away. McQueen asked, "Did you think to get any ammunition? All I've got is what's in this rifle."

There was a thrashing in the brush and Mixon appeared. He said, "Yeah, I got what they had. About thirty rounds. Here's a dozen."

McQueen said, "Hurray!" and let another one go. "You know, speaking of infantrymen, I never did realize how much fun they had. Look at that monkey tumble, will you?"

Mixon said drily, "I see him. I hear, too, that it's a good idea to move around a little when other guys are shootin' at you."

"Not Japs. The Jap never lived who could hit the side of a barn at over three hundred yards."

"Maybe. Anyhow, we got thirty rounds and we're still a hell of a long way from home."

DOWN below them, the shack was fully aflame. It was sending up a dense column of grayish smoke, and a dozen of the little men were scurrying about, evidently trying to get their friends out of it. Immediately below them, there was no more movement.

McQueen said casually, "There's nothing to worry about. Listen!"

Mixon cocked his ear. The faint sound of engines which McQueen had heard was stronger now, and unmistakable. Mixon asked, "You know what it is?"

"It better be those C-53s from Ladd Field. I expect it is. If those guys are as sharp as they should be, they won't need anything else but that burning shack for a signal. However, suppose you take over the delaying action for a few minutes while I go back of the ridge and be ready to give them the high sign."

He had just time to get his undershirt off and his shirt back on before the first of the big troop-carriers came over the mountain. The pilot answered McQueen's signaling with a couple of bursts on his throttle and, the next time past, the ship blossomed the most beautiful string of parachutes McQueen had ever seen.

The first one came to earth a scant hundred yards from McQueen, on the back side of the ridge. McQueen hurried to meet him. A big man in boots and a combat suit hit the ground and rolled expertly, cradling a short-barreled carbine in his arms. He was piling his chute and pinning it down when McQueen got to him. Around them, the rest of the first planeload, about a dozen troopers, were coming down.

The big trooper stood up. McQueen said, "Lieutenant, I'm glad to see you."

Lieutenant Riggs looked as if he'd tasted something slightly unpleasant. But he said, "Yes, Major. You got some trouble here?"

"I see Captain Gilbert or somebody has introduced me. Good. Yes, I've got a little trouble. Jap trouble, I think."

"How many and where are they?"

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McQueen told him. Then he said, "But the main thing is, I think they've got a camouflaged revetment over in the next valley. There's an airplane in it—a float plane of some kind. I think it might be a big Nakajima job with pontoons fitted to it. That's where we've got to get to before the word gets there that you people are on the scene."

Riggs considered. He said, "We'll have to do something about this mine situation, first. I've got the advantage of surprise, so far, and I'd better use it. There may be more of the vermin than you know about, Major."

"Dammit, man! What you'd better be doing is what I say, and quick! The important thing is that airplane and we aren't going to let them take it off before we get to it."

"Easy, Major," Riggs told him equably. "I'm the officer here—the ground officer—and this is my business, from here on."

McQueen said, "All right, Riggs. Then how about giving me three men to block the path between the mine and the other valley? Then you high-tail over that way as soon as you've cleaned up around the mine."

Riggs thought for only a moment. He said, "That sounds practical. Will do. . . Sergeant Krasnick, take Colson and Webb and go with Major McQueen. You'll be under his command until I see you again."

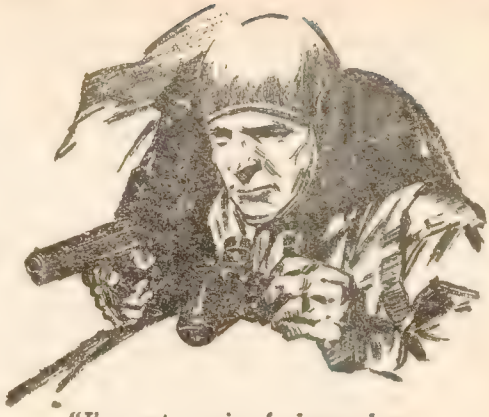
McQueen motioned to the three troopers to follow, and set out along the ridge toward the transverse hogback upon which the Beechcraft rested. Krasnick was a little man with a bulldog face and a competent air. The other two were younger but they looked capable.

They passed the place where McQueen and Mixon had fought. A rim of brush a few hundred yards ahead overhung the valley McQueen wanted to see. He placed Colson and Webb there, to cover the back trail. He took Krasnick along to have a look into that neighborhood where he had seen the thing that still puzzled him—that airplane.

He had told Riggs that it was a float-plane. The only reason he had for thinking so was that it couldn't be anything else. There was no place for anything else to fly from. Evidently, they snaked this thing down to the little stream somehow and towed it the half mile to the river. Maybe they could taxi it that far, if the smaller streams had a channel which carried as much as four feet of water. But why?

He didn't know any possible answer to that, but he meant to learn.

FROM the forward overhanging slope of the ridge, he and Krasnick could see the valley and the two tributary ravines on either side of what he had guessed to be the camouflaged revetment. There was no channel or even skidway leading from the stream up to the spot he suspected, but a shaft of the late



"I've got a pair of glasses here, if the Major would like to use them," said Sergeant Krasnick.

sun fell across the stream bank on the near side as he watched and he got an unmistakable glint of water where no water should be. He spoke to Krasnick.

"Sergeant, I think there's a channel coming this way from that stream, with netting or something stretched over it to look like the rest of the terrain. See if you can spot it."

Krasnick said, "I've got a pair of glasses here, if the Major would like to use them."

McQueen thought, I'm a brilliant so-and-so! Aloud, he said, "Thanks," and took the glasses. Under their six-power magnification, there was nothing to it. The channel showed up plainly and he could almost see where it entered under the screen behind which he had seen the plane.

Then, suddenly, there was no longer any need to guess. Firing began again, over the hill behind them. There was a ripping burst from a Tommy-gun and then several more. For a minute or two, it swelled to a heavy crescendo, then died away.

Krasnick was saying, "Sounds like the boys have moved in," when things also began to move down beneath them. Three men came running along the bank of the stream from above. From the way they panted and stumbled, McQueen supposed that they must have come from the mine. They were shrieking something in high, excited voices and two more men came into sight at the edge of the channel, undoubtedly from under the screen.

All five set frantically to work pulling the net off the parking channel. McQueen said, "Krasnick, can you put a stop to that?"

The sergeant slid his arm through the sling of his Garand, squinted at the range, and adjusted his rear sight. "About five hundred, a little more," he muttered. "Yes, sir, I expect I can discourage 'em some."

His first round kicked up a small spout in the stream beyond. It didn't stop the activity. His second, however, toppled one of the little fig-

Firing began again with a ripping burst from a Tommy-gun, and swelled to a heavy crescendo.

ures straight forward into the partly uncovered channel. When three of them had been hit, the others gave it up and scattered into the brush. No more appeared.

One of the troopers, Colson, came over the top of the ridge. He said, "There's a squad of ours comin' up the trail. I think Lieutenant Riggs and Cap'n Gilbert are with 'em."

McQueen said, "Keep an eye on them down there, Sergeant. I want to talk to Captain Gilbert. Colson, stay with Sergeant Krasnick."

The squad was coming along past the Beechcraft when McQueen saw them. He raised both arms high when the scouts picked him up, and kept them there until Riggs came close. A tall, thin man in an Air Force jacket was with the infantryman.

He had a quick, pleasant grin and a firm handclasp. He said, "Major McQueen? I'm Gilbert. So we finally meet."

"I couldn't think of a more opportune time or place," McQueen told him sincerely. "I take it that Lieutenant Riggs' people have smoked out that other rat-hole."

"Pretty thoroughly, I think. There may still be some of them scattered around in the brush, but we'll take care of them later. Tell me, though, what's over here? Riggs said something about a seaplane in a hidden revetment."

"It's there all right. I haven't seen the plane, but Sergeant Krasnick has knocked off three men trying to clear the ditch they use to get it —whatever it is—out into the stream."

"Well, let's go take a look."

McQueen said, "To tell the truth, Gilbert, I don't think I can make it down that hill. My left side is stove in like an old barrel and I shouldn't wonder but what I'm about on my last legs."

The wave of blackness which kept washing closer and closer each time he staggered told him that that was no exaggeration. Gilbert saw it with quick concern.

He exclaimed, "Here, Major, for God's sake! Get off your feet! Riggs has an aid man along and we'll have him here in a minute. You take it easy and we'll see about getting you out of here as soon as we can."

The ground felt better than good. McQueen thought that if he could just lie there for a week without moving, it would be all he needed. But he stayed conscious long enough to ask, "I damned near forgot about Mixon. Morse Mixon. Did you pick him up as you went in?"

"Yes, we have him. What about him, incidentally? What's the story?"

McQueen said, with an effort, "Mixon's all right. Tell you the story later."

WHEN McQueen awoke, it was nearly dark. He was wrapped in one of the aid man's blankets and he felt comfortably dopy. The man was squatting there, watching him. When he saw McQueen's eyes open, he asked, "How do you feel, Major?"

"Not bad. What did you do, shoot me full of morphine?"

"Gave you some. You got a pretty bad-lookin' side there. Wait a minute, Major. Captain Gilbert wants to talk to you."

Gilbert appeared and dropped to the ground beside him. He said, "Well, we'll be able to get you out first thing in the morning. Mixon showed us where you've been landing over on the river. We'll have a 53 try it just after daylight. We got one of them by radio and he's carrying the word back to Ladd."

"So Mixon showed you where we've been landing, did he?"

Gilbert grinned. "He also told us how you two went about getting out of the hands of our Japanese friends. Judging by *your* present condition, I figured that Mixon must've taken a major part in that little act. So I made it more or less clear that we weren't especially interested in fur. Off four-footed animals, at any rate."

"I'm glad of that. Weren't for Mixon, I wouldn't be here. But—what about that plane?"

"She's there, all right. A big old Nakajima."

"But, good Lord! What on earth for?"

Gilbert offered him a cigarette and held his lighter for him before he answered. When he finally did, he chuckled. "You've done a good piece of work for Uncle Whiskers, Major. But you didn't smoke out any Jap airbase. That wasn't what this was."

McQueen said, "I told Joe Douglas that, a month ago. So I was right? But what about Georgie Criqui? And what in hell was this, if it wasn't that? And what about that Nakajima?"

"It was just a mine. The Japs owned it and worked it before the war. They didn't want to give it up, after the war began. Evidently, they couldn't afford to."

"A gold mine? Why couldn't they give it up? And what good could it do them?"

"It wasn't a gold mine. Did you ever hear of iridium?"

"The stuff they put on the points of fountain pens?"

"Also on the points of magnetoes. Also many places in radios and in radar equipment. We found nearly five thousand ounces—over three hundred pounds—in one of those shacks."

"Doesn't sound like much."

"No? Lieutenant Riggs is something of a metallurgist and he tells me that is as much or more than the entire U. S. might have used in one year before the war. He says that the stuff's fantastically valuable. Was worth hundreds of dollars an ounce before the war and is now worth practically anything you might want to ask for it. He also says that it is probably priceless to the Japs right now, because the only sources of supply that he knows of—other than Alaska——are the Urals in Russia, Tasmania in Australia, the Union of South Africa, and Brazil. All those sources are closed to them now."

"I see." McQueen tried to grasp it. "Then the old Nakajima was making a trip every so often out to a sub in the Bering Sea or the Gulf of Alaska?"

"Probably. With extra tanks, she could do it."

"Sure she could. Sure she could. And she could slip by Ladd Field, easily. Elmendorf Field patrols would never pick her up. She have her wing gun mounts in her?"

Gilbert nodded. "Two 7.7's."

"Then we likely did get the guy who shot down Georgie Criqui. They might even have unshipped her pontoons and put wheels on, to operate in the neighborhood and keep people away until they got her well hidden."

"That's undoubtedly what happened," Gilbert agreed. "Well, it was a very nice job, Major. Now I suggest you try to get some rest."

McQueen was still thinking. "A nice job it might have been. If I had done it. But I'm afraid it was mostly luck."

Gilbert looked down at him and grinned. "The general won't know that. It is not my place to say so, Major, but I think the general is going to love you again. After he reads my report and hears about that iridium."

McQueen grunted. "It'll probably get lost in the mail."

Gilbert went away and McQueen was about to go back to sleep, thinking how nice it was going to be wearing an honest uniform and his own name again. Another figure approached.

Riggs said, "How are you feeling, Major?"

McQueen looked up from one eye. "Poorly. Very poorly, Lieutenant. I can't go out behind the barn with you tonight, either."

The big lieutenant grinned. "Dammit, Major, I think I have an apology coming for that wallop. Now that you've turned out to be a major, I guess that's about all I can hope to get."

McQueen said sleepily, "Listen, Riggsy. The day you and I can get out of uniform again, we'll make a date to meet in any alley you name and we'll put on the hell-roaringest brawl you ever saw. You and Aasie can bring all your little Scowegian kids to watch it, too."

As we reached the grandstand, some horse went by. Monk began to holler, "Hooray! Hooray!" Nobody else was hollering.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND THE FOURTEENTH VIRTUE

By

CLIFFORD KNIGHT

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN MEOLA

IT' WAS July 47th that year when Cherokee Red blew into Queen City. The reason I remember the date is not only because it was as hot as it can get in Kansas in summer, but because the next day was August 17th.

There were two newspapers in Queen City back in the late nineties. The *Gimlet* was edited by Old Man Smathers. He had wild popeyes and was always ducking his head when he walked, as though a bee were trying to alight on the back of his neck. The *Gimlet* wasn't much, as a paper; its insides were boiler-plate. That summer the boys in the back room didn't change the month on the masthead when July ended but, as a joke, kept on, just as though there wasn't any August. Old Man Smathers didn't notice it, but lots of Queen City folks did and thought it was a good joke, and wondered how long it would last.

But that first evening after Cherokee Red went to work over at the Queen City *Press*, an item appeared in the local column, which read: "If some editors would read their own papers instead of their rival's, they'd know what day it is."

The next day the *Gimlet* came out dated August 17th, instead of July 48th, as it might have done, and everybody laughed at Smathers.

As I say, that's how I remember the day Cherokee Red blew into Queen City that year.

I had been over at the branch-line depot watching the men unload a race horse, for the county fair was to begin the next week. While they were getting some trunks and bales of hay and other things out, I said to the colored man who was in the car with the horse: "I don't see your sulky."

He sniffed at me, then he said, "This heah ain't no harness hoss, white boy. This is a runnin' racer."

"What's his name?" I asked.

"You-all don' know nothin' in Queen City, do you? Ain't you all heard about Brother Beau Peep?"

"No."

"Well, this is him."

"What you got a rooster in here with him for?" I asked. There was a big Dominique rooster on the car floor, pecking about in the straw.

"Him? Tha's Li'l Joe. Him and Brother Beau Peep is pals. Now, gwan away. I got business."

He shooed me out of the car and soon he was leading Brother Beau Peep behind the dray wagon which was taking the outfit to the fair grounds, east of the creek.

It was then that I heard somebody on the depot platform say that Cherokee Red was in town, and I went over to the Queen City *Press* to see if it was true. He was already famous in our part of the country and was written up in the papers now and then, especially after he had left town mysteriously, as he nearly always did. For he was a tramp printer and he'd stay just so long in a place, then he'd move on. As it turned out, his stay this time was unusually short.

He had a kind of circuit that he traveled through our part of Kansas; it included several towns across the line in Indian Territory. There were lots of boomers on the railroad then. Queen City was a railroad town. A boomer never came back; tramp printers usually did. At least, Cherokee Red kept coming to town every now and then.

There always was a job for him. He'd come into the *Press* back room, hang up his coat, put on an inky printer's apron and start to work. The first time I saw him was that day after Brother Beau Peep had started to the fair grounds. He was setting type in the back room at the Queen City *Press*. He held a large-size type stick in his left hand, and his right hand was flying back and forth between it and the lower case, with now and then a swift grab out of the cap case. I never saw anybody set type as fast he could.

PROBABLY nobody in Queen City knew why he was called Cherokee Red. The name didn't seem to fit him, for he was a mild-appearing man with a sandy mustache and light-colored hair, and a sly way of looking at you before you knew that he had even noticed you. Maybe his nose was just a little bit red, but not very much. He had light blue eyes, and before I could even turn around to look at Ed McGinty who was setting up an ad at the ad case, Cherokee Red was looking at me. And all the time he was setting type.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello."

"Ever see any type lice, boy?"

Before I could say anything, Ed McGinty laughed and said, "You can't fool that boy, Cherokee. He's wise."

All I did then was grin. I had learned by experience how to make smoke come out of my ears, and that there aren't any left-handed monkey wrenches. Ed McGinty himself had got me on that one about type lice the summer before. He had me look closely at the type in a form which was unlocked on the stone. I didn't know he'd put water in it so that it could be distributed easier, and when I was looking hard for type lice, he suddenly shoved the type up tight and water splashed all over my face. Then he hollered and laughed.

"Smart boy," said Cherokee Red.

"Brother Beau Peep has got to town," I said. "They just unloaded him over at the branch depot."

Cherokee Red quit setting type all at once and looked at me very steady.

"He's a good horse," he said. "But never bet on a horse race, young man."

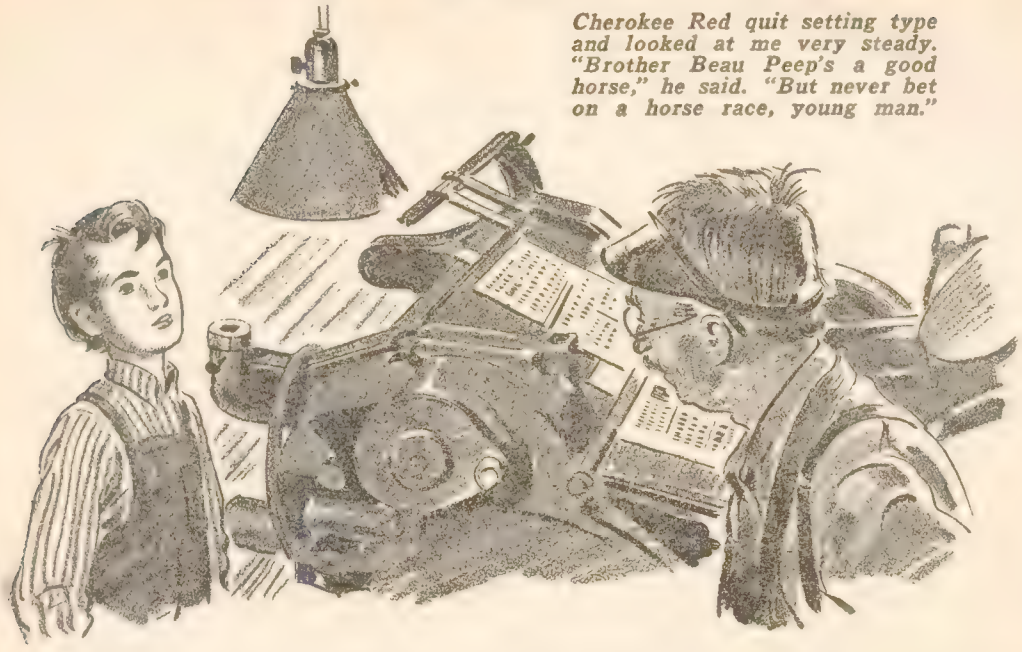
"I'd bet on Nellie," I said.

"Who's Nellie?" He leaned on the case and looked hard at me, and I didn't say anything right away. Ed McGinty answered.

"Nellie is Chris Turtelot's horse. She's a runnin' fool if there ever was one. Chris had been aimin' to plow her until he found out she could run. Everybody in Queen City knows about her. There ain't a soul here who wouldn't bet his last cent on her in a race, even against Brother Beau Peep."

Cherokee Red picked up his stick and turned back to the case, then laid it down again.

"I'd like to see it done," he said. "I mean, I'd like to see this Nellie, or any horse, beat Brother Beau Peep." Then he turned back to the case and began to set type faster than ever.



Cherokee Red quit setting type and looked at me very steady. "Brother Beau Peep's a good horse," he said. "But never bet on a horse race, young man."

There didn't seem to be anything else to say, so I went over to the team track at the branch depot. The local had set out a car of watermelons, and I thought that in case one got broken in the unloading I would be on hand. But after about an hour they locked the car up for the day, and I didn't get any.

There was a side door to the back room at the Queen City *Press*. It was on the shady side, and when I started away from the team track I saw that Cherokee Red had come out with a chair and was sitting reading a book. He put it down when I walked over that way.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Wade Gilstrap."

"You've heard of Benjamin Franklin, haven't you, Wade?"

"Yes."

"Greatest man that ever lived," he said with pride, and lifted the book in his lap only to drop it again. "Ben was one of us. He was a printer. And I'll tell you another fellow who's one of us. He tramped around over the country, too, more than Ben ever did. That's Mark Twain. But coming back to Ben. He was a smart man. When he was only twelve he was apprenticed to his brother, who was a printer. Yet he got to be a great man all by himself. Received at court. Sat down to eat with a king. Helped free our country from England, helped found these United States. Do you know why he succeeded?"

"Why?"

"Because he practiced virtues." Cherokee Red's little blue eyes looked hard at me. "He had thirteen virtues, beginning with the first, which is Temperance. 'Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.' He practiced each virtue for a week at a time. That way he could go through the whole thirteen virtues four times a year."

"Do you practice virtues?"

"Why—yes. Yes, I do, Wade." He opened the well-thumbed volume on his lap and ran his finger down a page. "Now, take Virtue Number Six—Industry. 'Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.' That's what Ben says. I practiced Industry all last week. I'm pretty good at Industry. I practice it a lot. That's why I can set type so fast."

"What one are you going to practice next?"

"Over the next week"—he referred to the book again—"I shall practice Virtue Number Seven—Sincerity. 'Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.'"

"What if you don't practice virtues at all?" I asked.

He put down the book quickly and looked at me sharply.

"If you don't, you'll never get ahead in the world, like Ben did. Nobody will. You'll probably wind up stealing chickens."

Ed McGinty poked his head out of the door then. He hollered at Cherokee Red, who went inside. I walked over to the Mansion House across the street, where some traveling men were sitting outside on the sidewalk telling stories about race horses. They knew all about Brother Beau Peep being a good horse, and they got to wondering if Chris Turtelot's Nellie

was any good at all. I said she was and that everybody in Queen City was going to bet his money on Nellie when they ran the race next week. Old Man Harlow, who traveled for a buggywhip house, said we'd all lose our shirts if we did, and so I went home.

NEXT day was Sunday and as soon as Sunday School was out, I went to the fair grounds. You could get in free before the fair started. A lot of men were sitting on the rail at the track where some harness horses were exercising. One of them was Cherokee Red. He chewed tobacco, and I got on the side of him from which the wind was blowing. He didn't see me at first, then he said, "Hello, Wade. You here?"

"Yes, sir."

"This ain't much of a place for a boy, especially on Sunday."

"I don't mind," I said. "I like to see race horses."

"Which kind do you like, running races or harness races?"

"I never saw any, but I like them both." He didn't say anything, then I said, "If I had any money I'd bet it all on Nellie. She's sure a good horse."

He turned around to spit with the wind, then he said, "Horse races aren't won on race tracks."

I didn't say anything right away, because it didn't sound like good sense to me. "But that's where they run 'em," I said, speaking up, because just then a trotter all in a lather went by close to the fence, stirring up a lot of dust and making some noise.

"Oh, sure, sure," he said softly in my ear. "The horses run around the track, but the race is won before they start."

I guess my mouth was open; Cherokee Red was crazy for certain. How could you tell how the race came out before it was run?

"You know," he said, and he put his hand on my leg and pinched it gently, "a race horse worries a lot, if you let him. And if he's worried, he can't run."

"How do you know? Were you every a jockey?"

"I was, until one day I got hold of Ben's book and started to reading it and thinking about things. I was getting too heavy anyhow."

"You rode race horses? Where?"

"California. San Francisco."

"Gee! 'Way out there?"

Chris Turtelot rode by on Nellie and everybody stopped talking to look when they went by. He was just exercising her, though. He wouldn't ride her in the race. Splinter Davis was going to be the jockey. He was thinner than a drink of water and Mrs. Turtelot was making him a jockey suit out of some of her silk pieces.

"I used to ride a horse, Wade, who had a burro for a stablemate." Cherokee Red started talking again. "Most horses have stable-mates. Usually they're fox terriers; sometimes they're chickens. One horse I knew in the old days had a goat. If you take away a stable-mate from a horse the night before the race, the horse will worry so about it all night that he won't be able to run next day."

"What about the horse with the burro?" I asked.

"Well, he was a little different. It was like this. He wouldn't run unless he could see the burro during the race. So we had to take the burro out and tie him in the center of the field, so he could see the burro while he was running around the track. And he'd run his fool head off because, you see, he wouldn't have to worry about the burro while they were separated."

"Aw, you're full of prunes!" I said.

Cherokee Red looked at me with a hurt expression in his blue eyes. He had to spit again. Then he said, "Well, I'm telling you the truth, Wade."

I could see that I had hurt his feelings, but I didn't know how to tell him I was sorry.

"You see, it's what they can do to a race before it's run that makes me say they don't win 'em on the track. Who's that spider-leg colored boy over there across the way?" Cherokee Red changed the subject on me.

"Him? That's Watson."

"Watson? Watson who? What's his first name?"

"He ain't got any."

"Ain't got any?" He looked at me kind of funny.

"He never did have any. At home they always called him A Baby. One day a new teacher the first day at school asked him what his name was and he said, 'A Baby Watson.' And she says, 'No, it ain't. I'm going to call you George.' But it didn't work, except at school."

"A Baby Watson—" Cherokee Red thought a while, then he remembered something. "Oh, yes. I set a little piece about him for the paper yesterday. He got arrested for chicken-stealing. Oh, yes."

"I wouldn't put it past him," I said.

"They couldn't prove it in police court. But I'll bet he got the chicken."

I climbed down off the fence-rail and started toward the barns. I heard a whistle behind me and I looked around. It was Cherokee Red, but he hadn't whistled at me. He was waving for A Baby to come across the track to where he was sitting.

Most of the horses were out on the track, but I came to a stall where Brother Beau Peep was being rubbed down by the man I'd seen in the boxcar. The old Dominique rooster was scratching around on the floor, and Brother

Beau Peep was holding his head down toward him and nickering softly.

"Why don't you exercise your nag if he's so good?" I said.

The colored man didn't say anything.

"Everybody else is exercising theirs."

"Ne' mind, white boy. Brother Beau Peep and I knows what we knows."

"Does he ever worry?"

"Him?" He patted Brother Beau Peep's withers. "Nawsuh! He's the unworrin'est hoss they is."

"He'll sure worry when Chris Turtelot's Nellie runs the socks off'n him next Friday."

The man opened his mouth like an alligator and laughed. He had to lean up against the side of the stall to keep from falling over.

"That ol' crowbait beat Brother Beau Peep! Don' make me laugh, it hurts my side."

I went away.

THAT morning at church Preacher Loveless hopped onto the sinners in Queen City. They said you could hear him hollering two blocks away. Hell was yawning for people who went to races and bet on the horses, just as it was for rum-guzzlers and gamblers. He didn't expect to see any of them in heaven when he got there.

I got to wondering what Ben Franklin said about horse races and betting on them, and I meant to ask Cherokee Red the next time I saw him. Maybe he had a virtue about it, which he practiced. Anyway, I was sure Ben Franklin knew more about what was what than Preacher Loveless did. I had twenty-five cents I had saved and I wanted to bet it, but I didn't know much about betting. And nobody I knew wanted to bet the other way.

So I said something to Cherokee Red about it the next day at the Queen City *Press*.

"My heavens, Ed!" Cherokee Red hollered and looked around at Ed McGinty, who was distributing type at the case. "The whole town's crazy! Something ought to be done about it."

"Nellie's an awful good horse, Red," said McGinty.

"You, too. You got any money bet?"

"A little."

Cherokee Red took out his handkerchief and wiped his face; the day was another scorcher.

"What does Ben say about betting on horse races?" I asked.

"Ben?" Cherokee Red looked hard at me. "Oh, yes—Ben. Virtue Number Five," he said, without looking in the book. " 'Frugality. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.' " He put away his handkerchief after mopping the back of his neck. "Waste nothing," he emphasized. "Betting is pure waste of money. If you lose, you haven't got anything to show for it."

Ed McGinty cackled. "What if you win?"

"You can't afford to win. Winning only sharpens the desire to bet again, and you'll lose sooner or later."

"I'll risk it, Red."

"Seriously, Ed, something ought to be done. Queen City's plumb crazy about this Nellie. And they'll all lose their shirts." He turned severely to me. "Don't you bet, Wade. Something ought to be done. Something ought to be done." He picked up his stick and type began to click against his rule.

That night there was an editorial in the paper about the evil of betting. Dad said it was doggoned good and he wondered who had written it, because, he said, the editor wasn't a flowery enough writer. I didn't say anything, but I guess Cherokee Red set it at the case.

But the editorial didn't do any good. Nobody talked about anything else but how much he had up on the race, and where could he find somebody who would bet on Brother Beau Peep against Nellie. By Wednesday, Queen City was humming just like the telegraph wires do when it's going to turn cold—all about Nellie and the race. A few had got scared on Tuesday, then all of a sudden everybody was surer than ever that Nellie would win. Something was going to happen to make it a cinch; that was the way I got it. It was a lead-pipe cinch. Those who had their money down were feeling sorry for those who'd been timid. They'd forgot all about Preacher Loveless and the editorial in the *Press*.

Two or three men would be talking when you came up. Then they'd spot you and hush up. "Don't say nothing about it," they'd say to each other. "Mum's the word. It's a peach of a scheme, though." Then they'd try to think of somebody else they could get to bet with them.

On Thursday afternoon I went down to the Queen City *Press* instead of going swimming in the creek. The county fair was on, but I wasn't going until the day of the races. It was still hot. They'd unloaded the car of watermelons at the branch depot, and I didn't get any. Ed McGinty was setting ads at the ad case when I looked in at the back door. Cherokee Red was at the water-cooler. He didn't see me at first. He went back to his case and set a couple of sticks of type. I started off and then I heard him holler. "Don't go away, Wade."

"Why?"

"Stick around and see."

I sat down on the ground outside the door. Half an hour later Cherokee Red came outside, carrying his chair, and sat down.

"All through?"

"For a while."

Then I noticed something else. There was a brown crock on the floor just inside the door. It was covered with a napkin. Cherokee Red winked at me, all the time looking at me

close. I didn't know what he meant. Then he said, "Hungry?"

"Sure."

"Like chicken? Fried chicken?"

"I like any kind of chicken."

He leaned inside the doorway and lifted out the crock and peeked under the napkin.

"Can you eat a drumstick?"

"Sure."

He handed out a big fried drumstick and I started to eat. It was good, and it hadn't been cooked very long, either.

"Charley Hoff fried it over at the Busy Bee Restaurant," he said, picking himself out a thigh and biting into it. "Can you tell the difference in the taste between a Plymouth Rock and a Dominique?"

"No. Neither can you."

"Hey, Ed." He leaned in at the door. "Come out and help eat up some chicken."

Ed McGinty came out and started in to eat, too.

ALEC WHIPPLE was over near the Mansion House sitting under the yellow umbrella of his baggage wagon. He saw us and climbed out of the wagon and came over to see what we were doing.

Alec had bet every cent he had on Nellie. There was a funny look on his face when Cherokee Red held out the crock to him. He ate two pieces without stopping.

"Like the gizzard, Wade?" asked Cherokee Red. And I ate that and the neck too.

"Goll-ee!" said Alec, wiping his mouth on his shirt sleeve. "Tomorrow we all get rich."

"I hope so," said Cherokee Red.

Alec went away and I went home when the crock was empty, and at supper Mom said I had a funny appetite when I didn't eat much.

"Is there any difference in the taste between a domerneck and a Plymouth Rock rooster—fried?" I asked.

"Of course not. What put that into your head?"

"Nothing."

Dad spoke up. "Folks in this town are insane. Alec Whipple late this afternoon was trying to bet that team of bays he uses on his baggage wagon that Chris Turtelot's Nellie will win tomorrow. He says Nellie can't lose now. But I don't know how he knows it."

"Any takers?" I asked.

"Nobody's as crazy as Alec is."

The next afternoon I went by the back way to the fair grounds. About sixteen other boys had the same idea. There's always a board off the fence and you can get in that way without paying. But this time the board was nailed back on, and when we shinned up and looked over, there was Constable Fraker on the ground below, anxious to arrest anybody who tried to get in free. He had a billy-club and his pearl-handled revolver, and his constable star was pinned on his blue shirt.

Nobody knew what to do; we hadn't counted on this. There was another guard farther along inside the fence, too.

"Better go buy tickets at the gate, boys," Constable Fraker hollered at us. "They ain't nobody comin' over the fence and gittin' in free." He whacked his billyclub on the fence, and we dropped down. There was a knot-hole a little way up the fence, but you couldn't see much through it, except the back of the grandstand. You couldn't even see the track.

Already you could hear people hollering over in the stand. The first race was about to start. While we stood there arguing, the horses got away and the crowd yelled and yelled. We had to get in somehow before Nellie and Brother Beau Peep raced. Some of the boys went off down the fence to see if they could find a loose board. If they could, they were to sneak in and then start running and let out a yell. That would attract Constable Fraker, and when he left his post we'd all shin over the fence.

But there wasn't any loose board, and when we tried to look through the knot-hole again, the constable was standing up against it and we couldn't see anything. We heard the yelling from the grandstand, though. Fat Atchley ran home to get his money and go in at the front gate. But he didn't get back at all, because his old man caught him and made him go deliver a package of spareribs from their butcher shop to somebody in the third ward.

My money was at home, too, but I couldn't afford to pay two bits for a ticket, so I didn't go for it.

We heard two races run, just going by the sounds from the grandstand. The second was more exciting than the first. We could tell that the crowd was working up to the fourth race, which was the one we had to see.

Monk Switzer thought of a scheme. We'd draw straws. The one who got the shortest was It. We'd all shin up the fence and drop over at the same time and start running for the grandstand—only the boy with the shortest straw would stumble and fall and let Constable Fraker nab him. One would be all the constable could catch, if he'd jerk and squirm and try to get away.

It sounded all right until you thought, what if you got the short straw and had to go to jail? Everybody had to be in on it to make it hard for the constable. We argued about it for a while. I was ready to take a chance, but Hick Stoner was afraid and Monk had to give him a Sweet Caporal picture to make him say he would do it. The third race was over before we finally got down to drawing straws. But we couldn't find any straws.

We started looking for something to take their place, and Sid Barnes came back from

The man laughed so hard he could hardly stand up. "That ol' crowbait beat Brother Beau Peep? Don't make me laugh, white boy!"

the creek with a lot of leaves he'd picked and said we could take the stems and cut them up like straws. But Monk yelled that it was poison ivy, and so we went eeny, meeny, miney, moe, and I was It. Hick Stoner came back from the knot-hole, and said Constable Fraker was still standing up against it.

All of a sudden the constable began to hammer on the inside of the fence and yell at us not to try to climb over, or he'd shoot. I was scared. We could hear the yelling in the grandstand and we knew it was Nellie's race. The crowd nearly took the roof off. Some of the boys got ready to shin up the fence anyhow. I started down along the fence to find a good place, but Monk Switzer, who was older and bigger than I was, said, no, sir, I had to go over the fence right by the knot-hole where Constable Fraker could grab me for sure.

"Yes, he'll grab me, but he'll shoot you other fellows."

Monk's face got kind of white and he swallowed, and he said he guessed he'd go over right close to me.

Just then the crowd let out a yell you could have heard in the next county, and we knew the horses were off. The boys all forgot about being shot at by the constable and started climbing up.

"Wait a minute!" Monk said in a loud whisper. "All together."

"But they're runnin' the race!" yelled Hick. "When do we go? I'm goin' now." He started jumping to get a hold on the top. Then we all started to climb up.

THE crowd was yelling its head off. "Go on, Nellie! Go on, Nellie! Go on! Go on!" They were pretty near tearing the grandstand down.

As we climbed up we could see the grandstand off through the trees; it was a long way over to it, too, but we could make it before the finish if we ran fast. Sid Barnes caught his pants on the top and fell off the fence on the inside and knocked the breath out of himself. We thought for a couple of seconds that he was dead and then he tried to sit up.

Monk Switzer hollered, "Hey, look, fellows! The old stinker! He knocked on the fence, then ran. That's just his handkerchief hanging over the knot-hole."

I looked and Constable Fraker's blue bandana was hanging on the fence just like Monk said. And we could see the constable through the trees, streaking it for the grandstand. Sid was all right now, and we all started running. Monk was beside me. There was a lot of yelling from the grandstand, and Monk said in puffs, "Gosh, they must—be—comin' down—the home stretch."

We ran faster. There was something queer about everything all of a sudden, though. I was thinking that if I came out on the north side of the grandstand, it was the shortest way to the track and I could get through the crowd and see the finish. But there wasn't much yelling; it suddenly quit, like air going out of a balloon. There'd be occasional shrieks, though, from somebody like Alec Whipple, who'd holler, "For the love of Mike, come on, Nellie!"

I could hear hoofbeats now; they sounded almost like the flyer on the mainline coming up on you fast when you're walking the ties. Monk Switzer was white around the gills. Both of us were out in front of all the other boys now. He grabbed off his hat and threw his head back to run faster, and you could hear the horses almost at the grandstand. There was a little yelling from somebody, but it didn't sound natural.

All of a sudden we reached the grandstand, and ran back of the crowd that was along the track. Some horse went by. We could just see over the heads of the crowd. I saw Splinter Davis and I knew it was Nellie coming across the finish line. He was riding on her neck, and his arm was flopping up and down like a machine as he whipped her in.

Monk began to holler, "Hurray! Hurray!" I don't know where he got the breath. Nobody else was hollering.

"What you hollerin' for?" yelled Alec Whipple.

"Nellie! She won!"

Alec pointed off down the track, and I looked and saw some horses that had finished the race down past the judges' stand.

"Down there by the quarter pole! That's Brother Beau Peep. He went by here a long while ago. Nellie's last."

The crowd piled out on the track and Nellie, with Splinter Davis in the saddle, was in the center of everybody. Splinter's face was all dusty with streaks of sweat through it, and his hands were shaking. The jockey coat Mrs. Turtelot had made out of her silk scraps had split up the back because she'd made it too small. They were asking him questions. Splinter's chin quivered and he wiped tears out of his eyes. He said, "Hell, I done the best I could," and then began to bawl like a baby.

"We ain't blaming you, Splinter," yelled Old Man Smathers, ducking his neck as though a bee was buzzing around him. "We saw you did the best you could. I wonder, though, what did happen?"

Everybody was wondering the same thing, I guess. The crowd was beginning to drift away. Nobody cared about the next race. They all started home. They'd all lost their money, and there wasn't any fun watching the other horses run.

I felt awful and started home through the trees the way I'd come. Somebody came up behind me, walking fast. I didn't look up, because I thought it was Monk Switzer. Then the fellow said, "Is this the back way out of the fair grounds, Wade?"

I looked up and saw it was Cherokee Red. His eyes were sort of wild.

"If you can climb the fence," I said.

"I can climb anything."

"Why didn't Nellie win when she was supposed to?"

Cherokee Red didn't say anything. Off among the trees, somebody who had been keeping a tree between us and himself started all of a sudden to run. He went off like a rabbit. I saw that it was A Baby Watson.

"What's a good eatin' rooster worth here in Queen City, Wade?" Cherokee Red asked.

"You can get one for twenty-five cents."

"I paid a dollar."

He swung up over the fence before I could, and when I dropped down on the other side, he was walking away as fast as he could go. I guess he didn't want any company, so I didn't try to catch up.

The whole town was sick because Brother Beau Peep had won, and people kept asking what happened that Nellie didn't beat him. It was supposed to be a lead-pipe cinch. Alec Whipple told everybody he'd helped eat Little Joe, and he knew it was so. He guessed there wasn't anything in the idea after all.

NEXT day was Saturday and I went down to the branch depot. Brother Beau Peep was shipping out on the local freight. They had him in a boxcar, and the trunks and bales of hay and a cot for the groom were in there too. I loked in and the colored man grinned at me. He seemed mighty happy.

"I sho' is feelin' good," he said. "We win, didn' we?"

"Yeah."

Just then I heard a clucking, and back in a corner behind Brother Beau Peep was a big Dominique rooster pecking around in the straw.

"Did you get another rooster?" I asked.

"Another rooster? Nawsuh, same old Li'l Joe. He an' Brother Beau Peep is pals."

"I thought they ate him."

"Et him? Not him! Not Li'l Joe. He ain't never been et. Ain' goin' to be et, neither."

"How come?"

"Listen, white boy—" He came over to where I was standing in the car door. "This town is the mos' ign'unt place I ever been in! They send a egg-haid cullud boy, name of A Baby, to steal Li'l Joe. I know why they want him stole, but I'm smart. I gits A Baby a rooster, but 'tain't Li'l Joe. And I charge him fo' bits fo' him, too. Then I fade him out of that other fo' bits he's got."

I went over to the Queen City *Press* to see Cherokee Red. I thought he ought to know what had happened. Ed McGinty and some other fellow was in the back room.

"We didn't eat Li'l Joe," I said. "He's over there in a boxcar at the branch depot right now. Where's Cherokee Red?"

Ed McGinty looked at me for a second or two.

"It was good chicken, though, Wade. I'd like to have another piece myself."

§ "A Baby didn't steal the right chicken."

Ed McGinty took a proof off a spindle and gave it to me.

"Read it," he said.

I read it.

> The great Benjamin Franklin was guided by thirteen virtues, which he practiced conscientiously in his early life, and thus was his character formed. They were sufficient for him in his day, but times change; this is a modern world. If a fourteenth virtue were required, as seems not unreasonable in these days, what would be more appropriate than the virtue Discipline: Attend strictly to your own affairs; be not one to put your nose into things that do not concern you?

I read it a couple of times. Ed McGinty was over at the type case setting something in his stick. When he finished, he went over to a galley where there was a little bunch of type and put what he'd just set with it, and then pulled a proof.

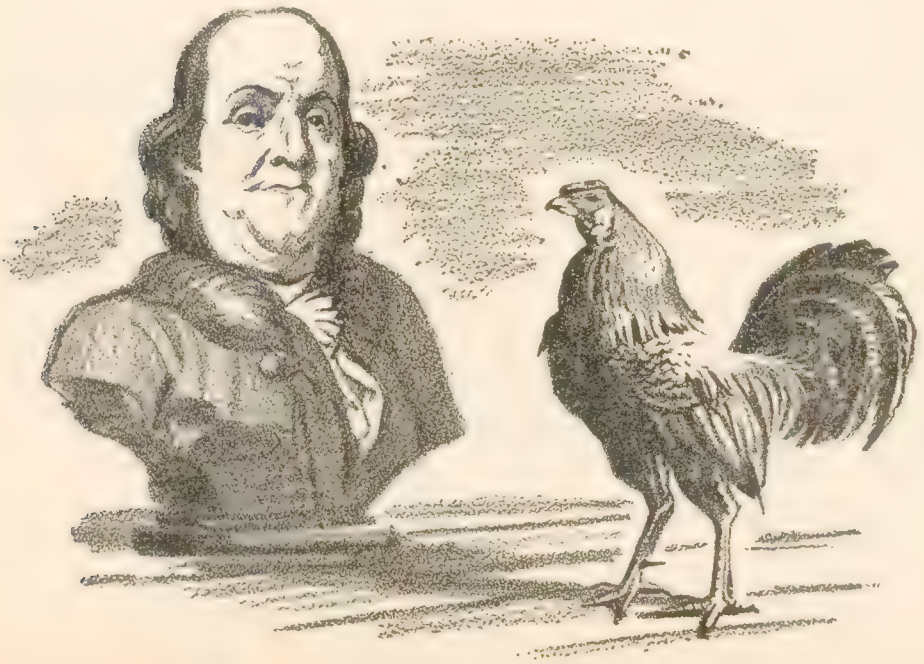
"Cherokee Red set that piece you've just read last night, Wade," he said. He handed me the new proof. "This is the way it'll run in the paper tonight."

I look at the proof. It was the same thing I'd just read, only at the bottom there was a jim dash, and then what Ed had just set followed:

> The old saying is that if you want a thing done well, do it yourself. We suppose that goes for stealing chickens.

"But where's Cherokee Red?" I asked.

"He didn't stay as long as usual this time, Wade."



NO JOB for a LADY

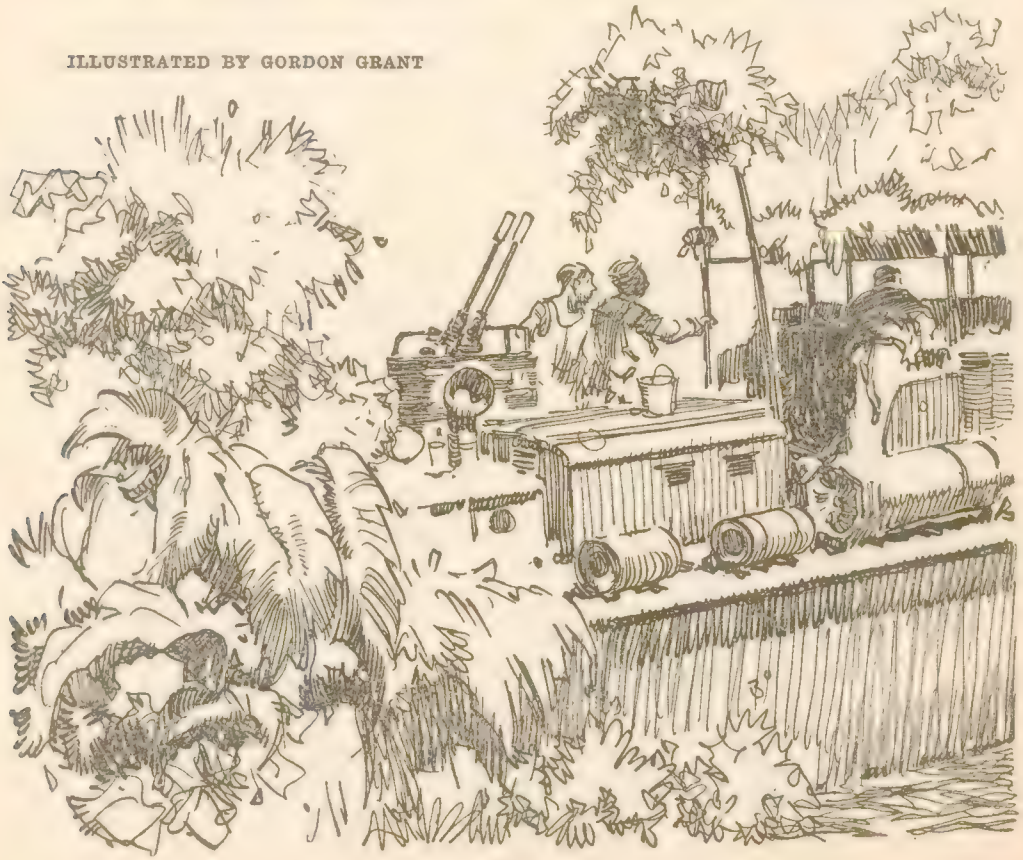
By RAY MILLHOLLAND

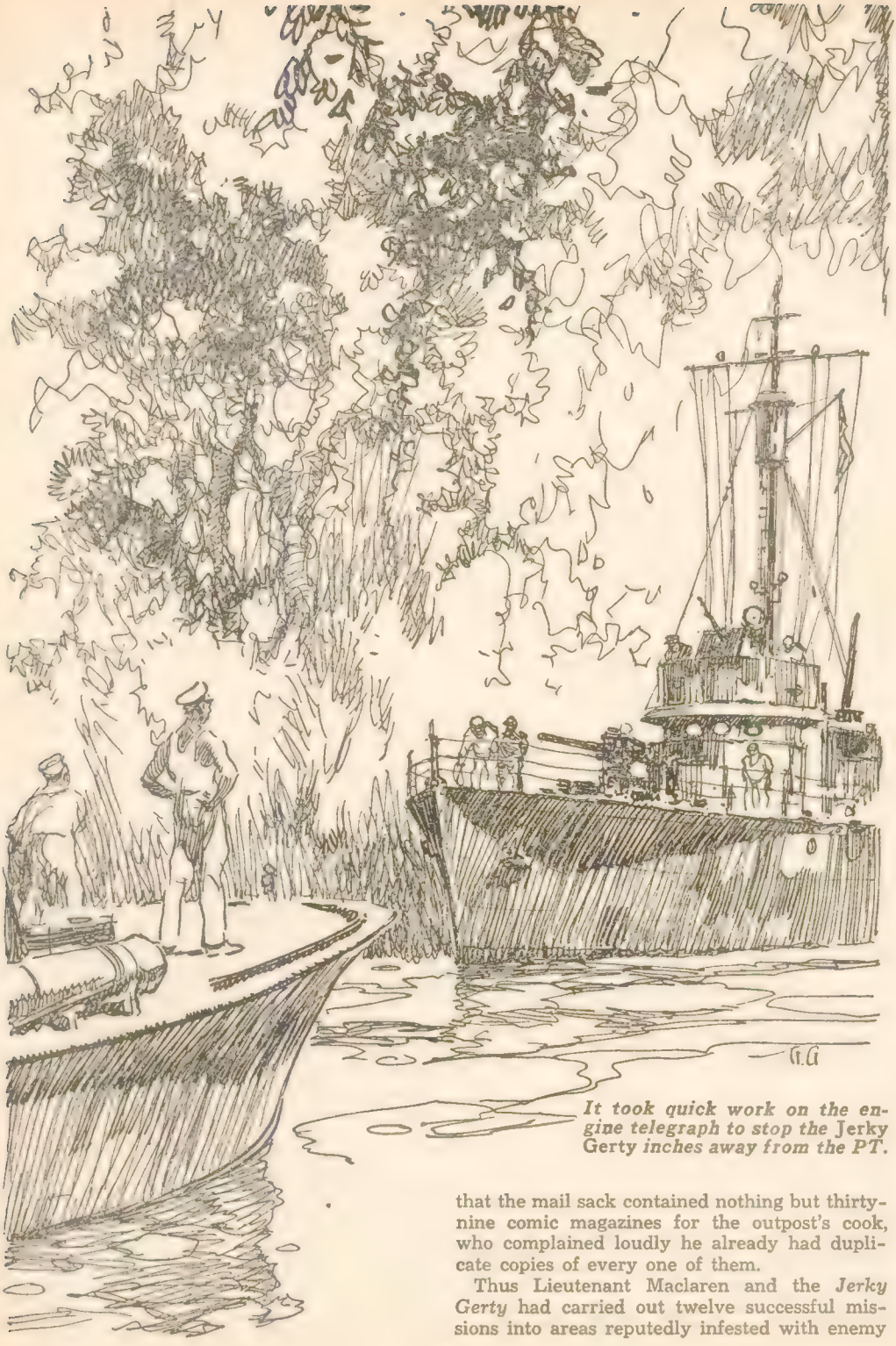
NO BEAUTIFUL girl with an armful of roses broke a bottle of champagne when the USS Submarine Chaser F-99 was launched at Norfolk Navy Yard. The ceremony consisted merely of a giant floating crane reaching over the dock and lifting the one-hundred-ten-foot wooden ship from her stocks and plunking her none to gently into the water. A few old shipwrights looked up from their work on still another submarine chaser and shook their heads gloomily over this business of sending a crew of fine young American officers and boys to fight the Japs in an unchristened ship. That was the end of the ceremony.

Perhaps it was just as well that Lieutenant (j. g.) James Edward Maclaren was blissfully unaware of what invariably happens to an unchristened ship. There was no tradition of seafaring in his background, which consisted of being born in a small Middlewest manufacturing town, spending four years at college acquiring an all-American rating as a football quarterback and, incidentally, a degree in mining engineering. Then, one hour and seventeen minutes after the first bomb fell on Pearl Harbor he had come to the unshakable conclusion that sinking Jap submarines offered more real excitement than sinking mine shafts.

Somewhere between stormy Cape Hatteras and a certain South Seas naval base, Lieutenant Maclaren's graceless crew renamed the USS S.C. F-99 the *Jerky Gerty,* after a can-can dancer of their acquaintance in Panama. Then came six months at the humdrum business of playing errand boat to small island outposts in the South Pacific, the last errand consisting of a two-day run through a howling storm to deliver a limp sack of mail to a nine-man radio outpost on a five-acre island, only to learn

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT





It took quick work on the engine telegraph to stop the Jerky Gerty *inches away from the PT.*

that the mail sack contained nothing but thirty-nine comic magazines for the outpost's cook, who complained loudly he already had duplicate copies of every one of them.

Thus Lieutenant Maclaren and the *Jerky Gerty* had carried out twelve successful missions into areas reputedly infested with enemy

submarines, surface ships and planes without so much as sighting even one timid reconnaissance plane of the enemy, to say nothing of enjoying the satisfaction of firing a shot in anger.

And while the skipper of the *Jerky Gerty* was waiting in the outer office to make his report on the successful accomplishment of his twelfth mission, Benson, the base operations officer, was in conference with the admiral.

"Now look," said the admiral, skinning his subordinate with an abrasive eye, "you send out a destroyer to deliver those repair parts to Wagner's PT's and she comes back, riddled and leaking like a lobster pot, without accomplishing her mission. Are you telling me I've got to send a full task force, just to deliver five hundred pounds of supplies, three miles up a jungle creek?"

The base operations officer said, "We can always fly Wagner and his crews out at night—"

"And abandon four PT's?" roared the admiral. "Never! The navy never abandons ship as long as there's a ghost of a chance." He got up and strode angrily to the window, making rumbling noises in his leathery throat. "H'm'm! Looks like the F-99 has come back . . . And not a scratch on her either. How the devil do you suppose young Maclaren got her through that force of Jap destroyers that swept the area he was in?"

"I don't know, sir," admitted the base operations officer. "But I'll bet something pretty he'll be here soon, squawking he gets nothing but guard boat duty and asking for a job with some excitement to it."

The admiral stared long and squint-eyed at the *Jerky Gerty*, then suddenly turned on his operations officer.

"Benson, you'll find it in my last book, *Naval Strategy*, that the element of chance—luck, or whatever you want to call it—must be ruthlessly excluded when a commander is making his plans for an engagement with the enemy."

"That's very sound doctrine, sir," agreed the operations officer.

"So I believed myself when I was writing that book," remarked the admiral dryly. "Before, you understand, I had to put my theories into practice." He took a quick pace up and down in front of the window. "But after six months of what I've seen out here, I'm beginning to suspect the greatest naval genius on earth would find himself in one helluva fix without a break of luck now and then . . . Send young Maclaren in to me, immediately."

Straight, bronzed and stiffly formal, Lieutenant Maclaren entered the admiral's country with his cap clamped under his left arm.

"Sir, reporting last mission successfully accomplished."

The admiral's noncommital eye ranged him from head to foot.

"Before entering the service, you played football in the Big Ten Conference, didn't you, Maclaren?"

"Yes, sir, a little."

"H-m'm! Made All-American three years, I understand."

Lieutenant Maclaren flushed under the direct but still noncommital eyes of the admiral.

"Only during my last two years was it a unanimous selection, sir."

"Ever lose any playing time on account of injuries, Maclaren?"

"No, sir."

THE admiral reached for a stack of papers awaiting his signature and without looking up said, "That's all, Maclaren. Return to your ship and stand by for further orders."

The skipper of the *Jerky Gerty* took a deep breath and stood his ground.

"With the admiral's permission, I have a request—"

"Granted. Proceed."

"Sir, I request that the F-99 be assigned to an active combat area where there's a chance of seeing some action. Six months of playing water taxi and hauling funny papers to people who've already read them isn't what either my crew or I expected—"

"What was that?" The admiral laid aside his pen with almost solicitous care. "Mr. Maclaren, am I to understand that you and your crew are cruelly disappointed in my—let us say, my ineptitude for making people happy and contented?"

"All we ask is a chance for some action," repeated Maclaren doggedly.

"All you want is action, eh?" barked the admiral, rapping his desk with his knuckles. "Take a good look at me, young man. I've spent exactly thirty-one years and nineteen days in a navy uniform. Every minute of that time I have been preparing myself for the one big moment of every naval officer's dream—the day he closes, shooting, with the enemy. So, here I sit, a glorified, gold-plated clerk—pushing papers around while men ten years my junior are getting all the fun and glory."

The admiral took a deep breath and dropped his voice to a bludgeoning monotone. "In time of war no man who discharges his full duty is of less importance to victory than any other man. The battle commander gives the orders that send the enemy to the bottom, I'll grant you. But it was all those thousands of others, clear back to the sweating laborer in the iron pit and the woman who packed his lunch bucket, who make victorious battle commanders . . . That's all, Mr. Maclaren. Return to your ship and *duty!*"

On his way back to the *Jerky Gerty*, his shirt plastered clammily to his spine from the sweat-

ing the Old Boy had given him, Maclaren was intercepted in the outer office by Benson, the operations officer.

"Did you get that assignment to action and glory you were after?"

Maclaren's face wore the expression of a man who had just swallowed a raw oyster with his warm beer.

"No, but I got a beautiful keel-hauling."

"In that case," said Benson, salting new wounds with a cheerful smile, "my last orders from the admiral still stand."

"What is it this time?" inqured Maclaren, sourly watching Benson spread an aerial reconnaissance mosaic over his desk. "Delivering a barrel of decayed cold-storage turkeys to some native island chief, again, I'll bet."

"This is a bay on the south coast of Island Three Seventeen," explained Benson, blandly. "Up this jungle creek, about three miles, you'll find Lieutenant Commander Wagner and four PT's hiding out and sweating for the engine repairs you will deliver with all possible dispatch . . . And just to be on the safe side, you'll take a deck load of eight torpedoes. I'd secure 'em with double lashings if I had to live with 'em," he added, casually.

Maclaren lifted his eyes from the written orders he had been scanning.

"For once, anyway, I'm not being told to avoid at all costs contact with the enemy. Or haven't I read far enough?"

A hesitant frown clouded Benson's face, then he said, "The Old Boy may not like my telling you, but this is no Coney Island excursion. You may have to bull your way in and then pray your way out."

Four hours later, tanks chockablock with fuel oil for her twin diesels and eight torpedoes and two cases of engine spares double-lashed along her gangways, the *Jerky Gerty* slid past the tender, which had been holding the harbor mine net open a full half hour after sunset, and dipped her forefoot into the oily swell of the South Pacific.

Ensign Knocky Dore, Maclaren's executive officer could retain his curiosity no longer. "Unbutton that cast-iron lip, Mac. What does this deck load of pickles mean?"

Maclaren shrugged.

"They're Benson's idea of something more appropriate than a case of Scotch for Toughy Wagner and his mob of reformed teetotallers, is all I know. We're supposed to deliver 'em up Soup Creek on Island Three Seventeen."

"You mean to say Toughy isn't expecting all this expensive jewelry?"

"Not unless he has queer dreams," said Maclaren, in a moment of rash forgetfulness of his executive officer's notoriously fertile, though not always logical, imagination.

"Speaking of dreams," mused Knocky. "I had a lulu last night. And not about women, either . . . We were being shagged by a big Jap cruiser. Shot all our ammunition at her. Dumped all our ash cans, but she still came on, growling, 'Grrrr'—actually—'I'm hungry for white meat!' "

MACLAREN'S complete absorption in laying out the course for the *Jerky Gerty* gave Knocky the deck unchallenged. He continued, "Then I found myself sitting on a pickle —honestly, a live pickle with her warhead primed and ready. So I slipped a spar hitch on her, and splasho! over the stern with her. Took five minutes to get a good sight with it at the Nip-nip, then I pull a lanyard fast to a toggle—release the pickle's buzzer and away it streaks for—"

"Look," said Maclaren, jabbing the point of his navigator's dividers into one of Knocky's softest spots, "you're keeping me up past my bedtime. Muster the crew aft of the engine-room hatch, pronto. I'm going to make a speech."

"Leave out that old wheeze, 'This is it, men,' " Knocky tossed back from the chart-house door. "Twelve times, you've failed to deliver anything that smelled like burning powder except target practice. They're getting a little bit sceptical."

Five minutes later, Maclaren stood on the engine-room trunk and faced the blurred mass of dark uniforms gathered to hear his speech.

"Men, you've stood Condition Two watches for twenty-six days out of the last thirty. Now you're going to get at least six more days of it. And every time I catch a watch letting down for a single instant, you'll hear the bull horn sounding General Quarters. This is no picnic we're on this time. Remember—"

"—this is it, men," squeaked a carefully disguised voice from the shadows of the after gun-shield.

Lieutenant Maclaren's jaw set hard in the darkness. He was about to snap out an order that there would be double watches from four to eight the next morning, when Knocky Dore stepped warningly on his foot. He checked himself and waited for the last snicker to subside, then said, "You may be smarter than you think you are, sailor . . . Ship's company dismissed!"

Later, on the bridge wth the stars swaying lazily overhead and the Southern Cross low astern, Knocky Dore said, "You got it back in your teeth, tonight, what I've been telling you. Morale has sunk to zero-zero and is still sinking."

"Mind your own damned business," snapped Maclaren, taking an angry turn across his small bridge.

"O. K.," said Knocky Dore. "I'll go you one better than that. At the end of this dead-turkey run, I'm filling a ticket for a transfer. There's a billet open on the *Honolulu*—"

"With my heartiest endorsement," snapped Maclaren, then leaned his arms on the weather-screen rail and stared savagely into the night.

Up from the foc'sle hatch, pitched to cut through the clatter and rumble of the diesels below, floated a thin nasal tenor.

Oh, I am a sailor, aboard the old *Gerty*
Way, way, blow the bull horn!
My shirt is all dirty and I smell dead turkey
Way, way, blow the bull horn!

When I joined the Navy, I thought battles I'd see
Way, way, blow the bull horn!
But I was mistaken, as bad as can be
Way, way, blow the bull hor—

The singing ended abruptly. Maclaren knew why, for he had seen the burly shoulders of Flynn, his third-enlistment boatswain's mate, silhouetted for a brief moment against a ghostly blue light when the foc'sle hatch was raised. Flynn had piped the crew down for the night.

In a moment, Flynn was back, to make his nightly report.

"No lights showing outboard, sir. All gear lashed and secure." Flynn cleared his throat in a formal gesture of diffidence. "And one more thing, if the captain don't mind—"

"Let's have it, Flynn."

"About me piping down the singing in the foc'sle, sir," continued Flynn, studiedly impersonal. "Them kids is too full of sizz and vinegar and spoiling for a little action to hit the rack and grab shut-eye without being told."

"I could stand a little action myself, Flynn," said Maclaren.

"Here's hoping for all hands," said Flynn and disappeared forward.

The *Jerky Gerty* logged two hundred forty miles on her first full day's run. Grumpy Daniels left the bridge after making his daily fuel report, grumbling to himself over the beating his engines were taking. Maclaren turned from studying a leaden, overcast sky to frown suspiciously at the ship's barometer which had remained steady all day.

Only Knocky Dore retained his good humor, his tiff of the night before with Maclaren on the bridge forgotten.

"Going to be as dark as my Aunt Julie's third-from-the-outside black petticoat pocket," he predicted cheerfully. "What a night to run onto a Jap submarine with its detector haywire. We can ease right up alongside and fumigate the smelly thing with a sprinkling of ash cans."

MACLAREN, who had been working out his dead reckoning position in relation to a small island which his chart showed he would be running down before morning if he held his present course, suddenly whirled and made a dive for the corner of the chart house. It wasn't to get his hands around Knocky Dore's throat and shut off his maddeningly cheerful patter, but to raise the hatch grating and call below, "Listener! . . . Merrill, what's happened to your signal?"

There was a moment of silence—at least a complete absence of the brain-piercing constant peep from the submarine detector which was supposed to repeat itself incessantly while the *Jerky Gerty* was under way. Radar, in other words—but then, the least said about its details the better.

"Merrill, what's happened?"

The listener's glistening bare torso appeared below.

"Another tube shot, sir. The third out of the last batch we drew. I'll have my last spare rigged in a second. Those last three didn't average fifty hours apiece."

"Then this one's got to last a hundred. Do you hear, Merrill? We'll be stone blind without it."

Merrill shook the sweat out of his eyes and nodded.

"Yes, sir. But all I can do is put it in and hope."

"One side, please," said Knocky Dore, all business, and pushed Maclaren aside and dropped below.

Maclaren took to pacing the bridge. The very silence of that brain-piercing peep from the detector was getting on his nerves. He growled sharply to the man on watch at the starboard twenty-millimeter anti-aircraft gun to get the slack out of his back. He flung back his head and bellowed aloft, "Crow's-nest watch, keep those damned glasses working!"

Unobtrusively, Boatswain's Mate Flynn was at his elbow, offering a mug of black coffee.

"The captain's java—"

Maclaren stared at the coffee mug, then at Flynn. Boatswain's mates just didn't play mess-boy and serve afternoon coffee. Their eyes met, understandingly.

"Thanks, Flynn," said Maclaren.

"I also took the liberty, sir, of passing the word to serve a shot to all hands," said Flynn. "The kids are a little jumpy since the peep quit."

Just then the incessant signal of the detector resumed its cadence. Knocky Dore appeared from below, wiping the sweat from his eyes on a shirt sleeve but otherwise unperturbed.

"Everything is all pretty again. One of the electrical gadgets that tells what plate voltage to use on a timmynoggle was lying its fool head off. Everything's fixed."

Maclaren halted his cup halfway to his lips.

"What the devil do you know about such gear, anyway?"

Knocky Dore almost blushed.

"Oh, I fiddled a little with ham radio once.

Remembered I'd burnt up a whole basket of tubes before I discovered a—a timmynoggle was grossly understating the voltage I was poking into 'em. Tubes aren't supposed to do that, so naturally I checked voltage first thing. Some of the hair off the dog that bit you—and ping! I stumbled right onto the trouble."

Maclaren took a deep swig of coffee.

"Knocky, you're something terrific. But I haven't figured out in six months just what."

The *Jerky Gerty* plowed her way on through the dusk and into the night. The detector kept up its incessant peeping in quest of an enemy submarine that chose to remain elsewhere, as usual . . . Dawn; then noon relief for the men standing watch at the guns.

Maclaren wrote in his log, *No enemy sighted today,* then took another look at the barometer. It was steady.

Shortly after that, Knocky Dore popped up from below with a decoded radio message.

Maclaren read, "PBY patrol reports enemy flat-top escorted by three destroyers now on course to arrive Island 317 at 1800. Avoid being sighted at all costs until engine spares are delivered."

"Too late, I suppose," sighed Knocky, "grabbing our hat and scooting for somewhere else.

"Not this time," said Maclaren. "This time, we bull our way through." He rang the engine room for the last reserve of emergency speed from the two diesels and plucked the binoculars from the box to sweep the eastern horizon.

Knocky turned, saying, "Guess I'd better ease below and break out that packet of morphine syrettes I pinched from the base hospital before we left."

The next time Flynn edged his way along the port gangway, Maclaren beckoned his veteran boatswain's mate to him and said quietly, "Better sand the deck, Flynn."

Flynn nodded. "I figured something was up. Daniels was beating his gums over that forced-draft signal to the engine room." He dropped his eyes to a long, slim shape, double-lashed in the gangway under a strip of gray canvas. "I'd feel better, Captain, if them things was back on the beach. One bomb sliver through a warhead—"

"Strip the mattresses from the after bunks and cover them," said Maclaren. "If we go, we might just as well make it as tough a job for 'em as possible."

Flynn turned unhurried eyes aloft, then remarked, "Anything that comes in under that ceiling is gonna make pretty good targets. The first three or four, anyways—"

THE *Jerky Gerty* dressed for battle was still nothing more than a small wooden ship crammed to the hatches with ammunition and depth charges, to say nothing of those eight torpedoes lashed down in her gangways. Maclaren indulged in a little grim speculation about where a single shell might land without touching off some part of the explosives aboard and finally decided that there wasn't much difference—the first enemy hit would be the last.

"Land ho! Dead ahead, sir," sang out the crow's-nest watch.

Maclaren swung his glasses toward a vague cloudlike lump on the horizon. Island 317 was still about two hours running time away, he judged. No scouting planes to eastward as yet. And no smudge on the horizon, either . . . The *Jerky Gerty* continued her bee-line course for Island 317 with smoke from her overworked diesels beginning to trail in acrid wisps from the engine-room ventilators.

Maclaren had strained his eyes, scanning gray skies and a leaden sea, until they burned like coals of fire in their sockets.

"Damn 'em, why don't they come?" he snapped at Knocky Dore.

"Simple," said Knocky glancing aloft. "Ceiling, one thousand. Nasty rocks all over the bottom around here, the chart says. We're practically as safe as if we were under Aunt Julie's feather bed."

It was so obviously a fact, now that he was reminded of it, that Maclaren released a weary sigh and picked up his binoculars. Yes, there dead ahead was the small pocket-like bay. Then Soup Creek would just a point off the course he was now on.

Two hours later, the *Jerky Gerty's* diesels, clucking along at reduced speed, churned up a narrow, twisting jungle river. Around the next bend, it took quick work on the engine telegraphs to stop the *Jerky Gerty,* with her bow just inches from the side of one of Lieutenant Commander Wagner's cleverly concealed PT's.

A grease-smeared grin appeared from the PT's engine-room hatch.

"Wagner's the name, Maclaren. Welcome the *Jerky Gerty* to Soup Creek!" Then a pair of steel-gray eyes spied the deckload of torpedoes. "Is that all you brought?"

"Practically," admitted Maclaren dryly. "Except for a couple of cases of engine junk."

"Gang!" yelled Wagner, vaulting from his engine-room hatch. "Spares! Come and get 'em, you lazy snipes."

In a trice a swarm of motor mechanics and officers of the four PT's fell upon the two cases of engine spares and ripped off the tops.

"Bearing shells for Casey's starboard motor!" gloated Wagner. "And I'll brain the man who drops one overboard . . . Carlton, here's your supercharger drive . . . Your exhaust valves, Niel . . . Now if my two pistons aren't here, I'll tear somebody's throat— Check. All accounted for."

Maclaren said, "Gentlemen, I have some nice cool ice cubes, and—ah, the necessary. Would you care to join me in a quick one?"

"If you got any ice," said Wagner over his shoulder, after lowering his precious pistons to one of his crew alongside in a rubber boat, "Put it in a sack and toss it ashore. We'll lick it on our way out after that juicy flat-top . . . Get going, you snipes! We're clearing out of this hole at dark."

Maclaren leaned over his bridge rail and called down, "What shall I do with this deck load of torpedoes?"

"That's your worry," Wagner tossed back, pushing away from the *Jerky Gerty*. "I've got plenty for this show." He waited until his pistons were handed aboard to a waiting motor mechanic, then paddled his rubber boat back. "Sorry to be short with you, Maclaren, but you'll have to get your damned tub out of here. One of our PBY's dropped me a message streamer just an hour ago saying there's a Jap flat-top and three destroyers standing off, waiting for the ceiling to lift so that they can plaster this place. Your best bet is to drop down to the mouth of the creek and take it on the lam the minute it gets dark. But keep clear of us or we'll split you wide open."

"Nice bright party, but awful short," was Knocky's comment, after the *Jerky Gerty* was warped about in the narrow stream and the engines were going again at reduced speed.

At the mouth of Soup Creek, Maclaren edged the *Jerky Gerty* close to the bank and climbed to the crow's nest. He swept the dull line of the horizon beyond the opening of the bay with a signal glass, then climbed down again.

"What gives?" inquired Knocky, looking almost comic in his heavy battle-pot.

"This is it," said Maclaren, quietly. "Three planes from the flat-top are heading this way. We're going out and pull the old lame duck trick to give Wagner more time to work on his engines. . . . We bulled our way in, but we'll have to pray our way out—shooting."

Down went his thumb on the general alarm button, and at the same time the *Jerky Gerty* lashed ahead at full speed, out into open water. The men boiled out of the hatches and manned their stations. There was the clank of automatic cannon being charged.

Knocky Dore said casually, "All firing stations manned and ready, Captain."

"Commence firing when you get a target, Mr. Dore."

MACLAREN watched his executive officer take his station as gunnery officer for the battle. For the first time he understood how his old college football coach felt just before sending his team out for the kickoff of a crucial game. . . . ("Men I've tried to teach you how football should be played. What you do in the next sixty minutes will prove whether I am a coach or a bum. Maclaren will call the plays, as usual. Get going!") . . . Only now it was Knocky Dore who was the quarterback, the one who was calling the shots at the vulnerable spots in the enemy's formation of approaching planes. All-American Quarterback Maclaren, the man who the sports writers said had never made a strategic mistake in the selection of his plays, was on the sidelines.

Like his old coach on the bench, Maclaren searched the taut faces of his crew standing to their guns, helpless now to do much if they cracked under their first battle test.

Knocky Dore's voice came out of the bull horn. "I'm giving you birds fair warning. The man who pinched my last squirt of shaving cream had better bust his target today or he goes off the Liberty List for thirty days."

Maclaren had just time enough to see slow grins relieve the taut faces of the crew manning the Bofors gun forward, before Knocky Dore began again in a chanting monotone. "Three planes coming in low at twelve o'clock. Start tracking! . . . Lead 'em! . . . Hold your fire until I give the word. . . . Lead 'em! Lead 'em. . . . Stand by—"

On came the three planes, swerving and roller-coasting in evasive action to confuse the aim of their victim. They were not planes at all to Maclaren, but evil birds of prey, gloatingly confident. Then, like a cat playing with a mouse, the three enemy planes zoomed off toward nine o'clock without firing a shot. A look of outraged disappointment swept the faces of the gun crews.

"Don't worry," chanted Knocky through the bull horn. "They just don't like the looks of you birds on the Bofors. They'll try the back door, this time. . . . Keep tracking!"

"Hard down, left!" said Maclaren to his helmsman, then signaled the engine room for full speed astern on his port engine. The *Jerky Gerty* whirled like a can-can dancer and faced the attacking planes again.

"Lead 'em," chanted Knocky. "Hold your fire until I give the word. I want meat with my music. . . . Stand by—"

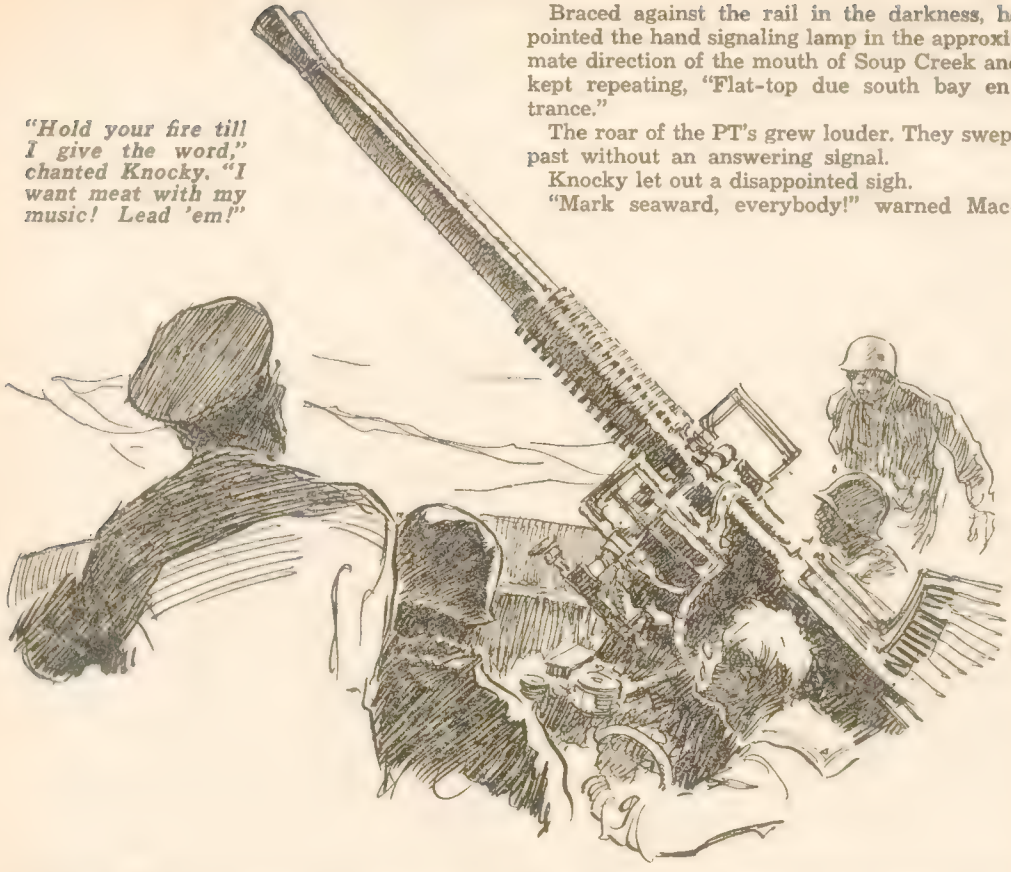
But again the planes zoomed off, this time at three o'clock. The men at the guns shook their fists at the sky and cursed tauntingly.

Twice more the three enemy planes made menacing passes at the *Jerky Gerty* without a shot being fired on either side. Then suddenly they sheered off and streaked seaward, out across the bay toward a faint smudge on the horizon.

"Well, how do you like that?" came Knocky through the bull horn.

The gun-pointer of the Bofors screamed back, "For God's sake, when do I get to shoot one of those yellow lice?"

"Just hold your shirt on," replied Knocky evenly. "We'll have a dozen targets instead of three to work on . . . There will be a slight delay before the curtain rises for the second act. You can take it easy, men."



"Hold your fire till I give the word," chanted Knocky. "I want meat with my music! Lead 'em!"

Knocky switched off the bull horn and turned a completely baffled pair of eyebrows on Maclaren.

"Am I awake or is this just another one of my fantastic dreams?"

With studied effort, Maclaren controlled his voice to an undertone. "Man, *why* didn't you cut loose? At least, there was a long chance of winging one of them."

Knocky shook his head.

"Only dead ones count. Must always kill the first bird you shoot at over a young dog. Puts dash and confidence in him. Very strict rule of my Uncle Newsom."

A large, lazy tropical raindrop splashed on the back of Maclaren's hand. Then began a steady, drumming downpour that reduced the hemisphere of visibility about the *Jerky Gerty* to a matter of less than a hundred yards. The downpour continued until darkness, while Maclaren conned his ship in a lazy circle inside the bay.

"Thunder?" asked Knocky, lifting the rim of his battle-pot from his windward ear.

Maclaren listened, then shook his head.

"Wagner coming out, hell bent. Hand me the can-blinker."

Braced against the rail in the darkness, he pointed the hand signaling lamp in the approximate direction of the mouth of Soup Creek and kept repeating, "Flat-top due south bay entrance."

The roar of the PT's grew louder. They swept past without an answering signal.

Knocky let out a disappointed sigh.

"Mark seaward, everybody!" warned Maclaren. "They won't risk answering except to the stern."

Then it came in a series of rapidly winking flashes: "Hold your station. May need your—" The flashes ceased.

Knocky said, "Well, it's about time somebody was admitting they may need our assistance."

"Wagner meant torpedoes," growled Maclaren sourly and signaled the engine room to reduce the diesels to minimum sped. "We will resume Condition Two, Mr. Dore. No sense in holding the men at General Quarters any longer."

BY ten o'clock the rain had ceased as suddenly as it commenced. And the stars broke through the overcast, as if a curtain had been rolled back. The crew, to a man, where ranged along the seaward rail in hushed anticipation.

Then the air vibrated from the impulse of a distant explosion.

"First blood for Wagner," said Maclaren. But before the crew of the *Jerky Gerty* could vent a gloating cheer, the distant rim of the sea became alive with flickering light. Then search-

light beams stabbed frantically upward as though searching the sky for attacking planes.

The night air trembled again.

"Second torpedo home," said Maclaren.

"Three for Wagner," added Knocky Dore. "I'm catching on to this game fast."

The whole seaward horizon began to redden, and eventually tongues of flame lapped hungrily above the horizon.

"Wagner has done it again," said Maclaren, and signaled the engine room for full speed as he headed for the mouth of the bay to intercept the returning PT's as they came limping back with the dawn.

Just an hour after that, back at the base, Benson interrupted the admiral at breakfast.

"Maclaren has broken radio silence," said Benson, holding out the decoded message.

"Then this is his last will and testament." The admiral scowled ferociously. "That enemy flat-top and her destroyer escort have gobbled him by now. Read me the thing."

"Maclaren is transmitting for Wagner," explained Benson, by way of preface. " 'Contact at 2145 with one enemy carrier and three destroyers. Action broken off 2301 for lack of further targets. Victory largely due skill and daring commanding officer S.C. F-99 carrying on delaying action against dive-bombers giving my command time to repair engines. Returning to base in tow of same.' "

The admiral rapped the end of his nose with his napkin and chuckled like a man well pleased with his own judgment.

"Bet you thirty days' leave in the States, Benson, against that last bottle of Scotch you're holding out on me that Maclaren brings that little pine box of his home without a splinter missing. He's that lucky he could step on a skunk and pick up a diamond necklace from under its foot and walk away smelling like attar of roses. That's the kind of a man, m'boy, that makes reputations for admirals—lucky ones."

"There's more," said Benson. "Sort of an endorsement from Maclaren."

"Barge ahead, Benson. My kippers are getting cold."

Benson cleared his throat and read, " 'Have beautiful girl with bottle of champagne standing by for delayed christening.' He signs off, sir, as 'Commanding Officer, USS *Jerky Gerty,*' —whatever he means by that."

"He's still battle-daffy," stated the admiral flatly, with a confident nod at Benson. "But when he comes out of it, we'll hear no more squawks about not seeing any action—not after having to shoot his way through a swarm of Nip dive-bombers. Maclaren is plated with bullet-proof luck. Remember that, Benson, when trouble has us by the short hairs again."

A long, weary six hundred miles away, Maclaren grinned engagingly across the breakfast table he was sharing with Wagner on the small bridge of the USS S.C. F-99.

"Look, Wagner, with the *Jerky Gerty* teamed up with your bunch, we could really make a war out of it in this neighborhood."

Wagner's steely gray eyes flicked across the rim of his coffee cup. "What the hell do you need us for? With your luck, Maclaren, I could load a rowboat full of rocks and sink the whole Jap navy single-handed."

Which was virtually the same thing the admiral was saying to Benson at exactly the same instant.

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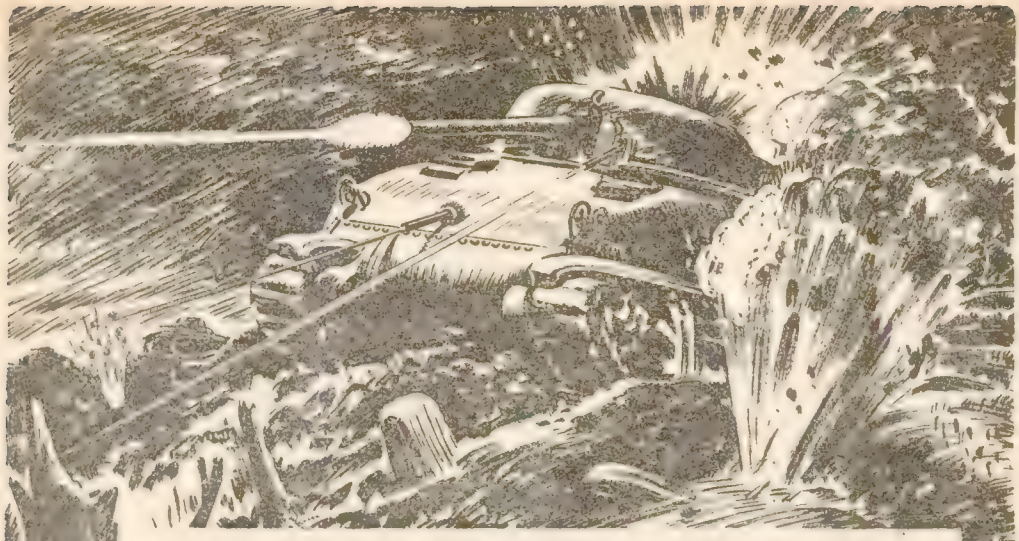


TANK PARTY

By R. B. MOLLOY

DECORATION BY PETER KUHLHOFF

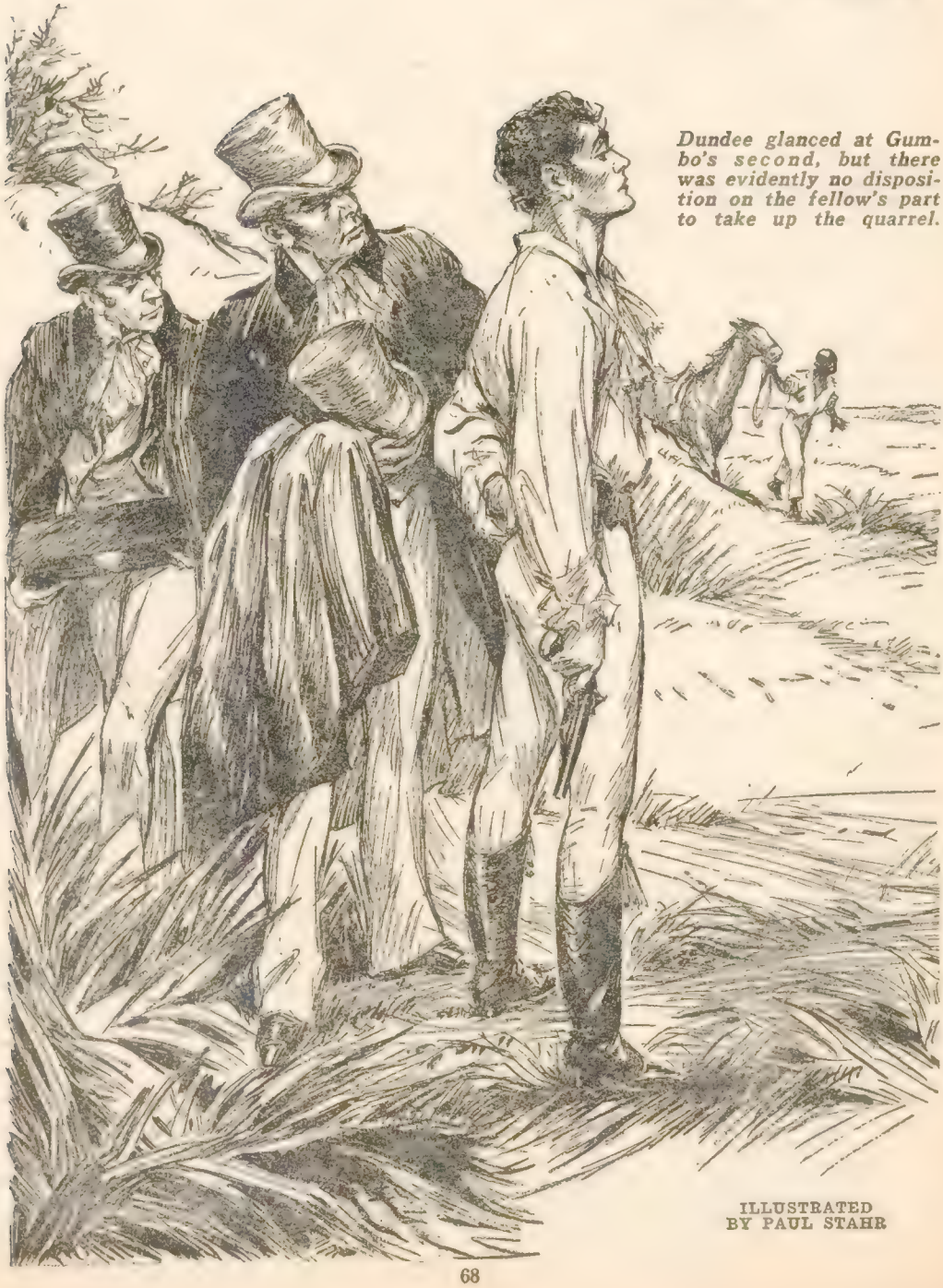
She's a forty-five-ton dragon with a dirty load of death;
She eats high-octane dinners and there's gas upon her breath;
She's black and loud and smelly and her language hot and hearty,
But she's got an invitation so she's going to a party!
(Sealed within her we are five—
Suicides but still alive.)

We are cramped and tired and aching
And our tortured skulls are breaking
From the clatter in our headphones with their crazy dit-dit-dar;
Now we're headlong in a crater
And a breathless minute later
Our silly hopeful dragon reaches upward for a star!
Were these fields of rocks and flowers?
Not to monsters such as ours,
She is headed for a party and the party's starting now.
She is roaring and advancing
In her elephantine dancing
As her treads crunch through the carcass of an interfering cow.

When our dragon goes to parties she is armed to kill the host,
And it's up to her to show him that she's fustest with the most;
She belches as she promises to make the trip again,
Then she's heading back to harbor with her weary aching men.
(When there's room for God plus five,
Suicides go home alive!)

PISTOLS

By WILLIAM

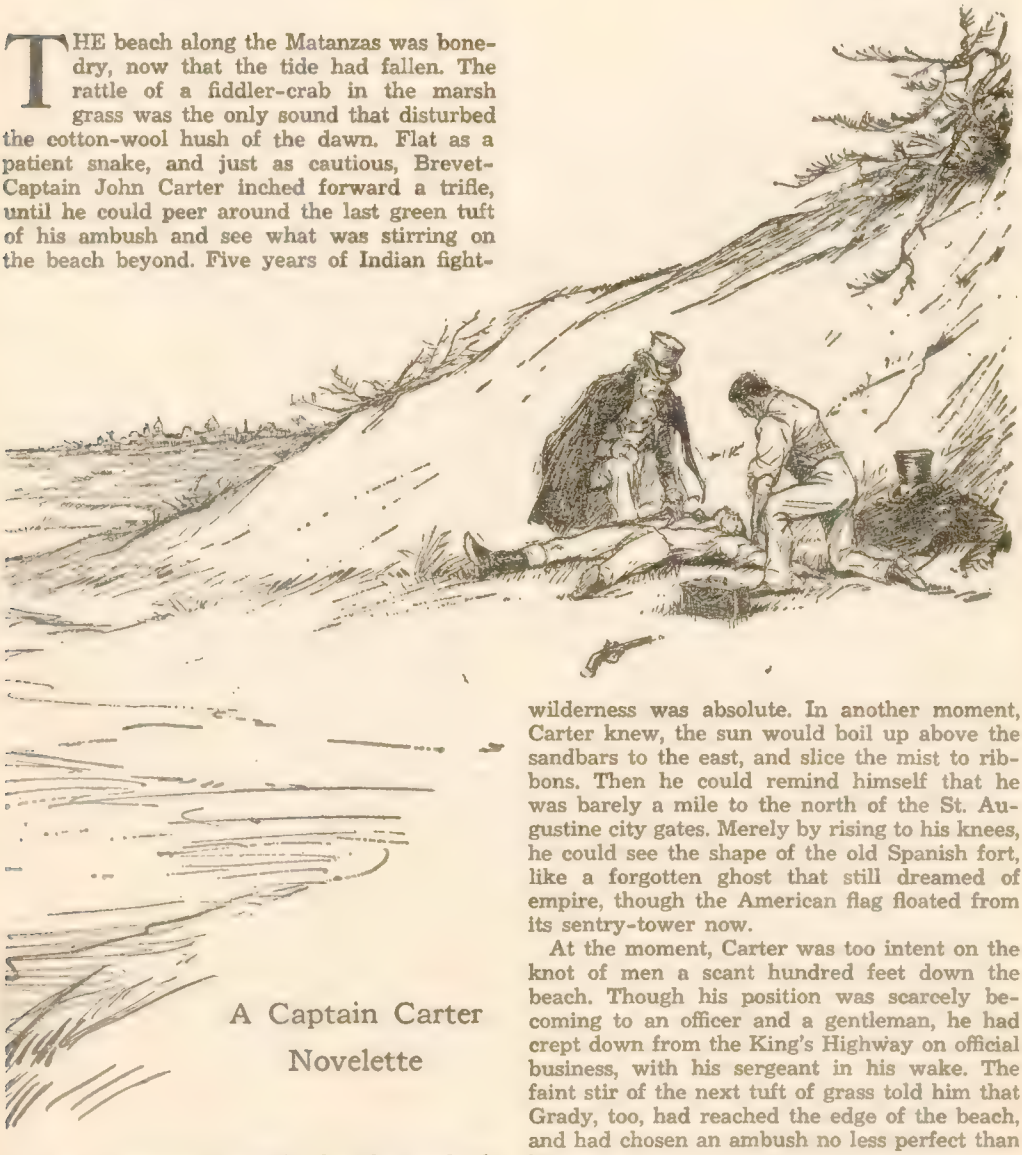


Dundee glanced at Gumbo's second, but there was evidently no disposition on the fellow's part to take up the quarrel.

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL STAHR

WITH COFFEE

DU BOIS



A Captain Carter Novelette

THE beach along the Matanzas was bone-dry, now that the tide had fallen. The rattle of a fiddler-crab in the marsh grass was the only sound that disturbed the cotton-wool hush of the dawn. Flat as a patient snake, and just as cautious, Brevet-Captain John Carter inched forward a trifle, until he could peer around the last green tuft of his ambush and see what was stirring on the beach beyond. Five years of Indian fighting was insurance enough that his ambush was adequate. Still, he had to make sure that he was not in the line-of-fire—when the shooting started.

Here at the curve of the great tidal river, where the tangle of dwarf cedar and water oak sloped down to merge with the marsh-grass at the water's edge, the feel of the wilderness was absolute. In another moment, Carter knew, the sun would boil up above the sandbars to the east, and slice the mist to ribbons. Then he could remind himself that he was barely a mile to the north of the St. Augustine city gates. Merely by rising to his knees, he could see the shape of the old Spanish fort, like a forgotten ghost that still dreamed of empire, though the American flag floated from its sentry-tower now.

At the moment, Carter was too intent on the knot of men a scant hundred feet down the beach. Though his position was scarcely becoming to an officer and a gentleman, he had crept down from the King's Highway on official business, with his sergeant in his wake. The faint stir of the next tuft of grass told him that Grady, too, had reached the edge of the beach, and had chosen an ambush no less perfect than his own.

The knot of men stirred and broke apart, as the gray light grew about them; when the first arrow of sun struck through the river fog, one of them was already pacing off a stretch of ground to test its firmness.

"Here will do, gentlemen. It's almost light enough—"

The general owed the luxury of real coffee to the generosity of a visiting fire-eater from Charleston.

Grady and Carter exchanged nods from their ambush. Both of them had recognized the speaker as young Pinckney's second, the massive and debonair Dundee (of the Charleston Dundees) who had made the voyage to the Floridas with his friend only a week ago and would go back on the packet this same morning, when the business at hand was finished.

The other second was already at Dundee's side, flaring the wide skirts of his coat a little as he tested the ground the other man had chosen. For an instant, they bristled silently at one another, and Carter wondered if a second duel was in the making. Then, with stiff, identical bows, they stalked off the field of honor to make room for the principals.

The fifth figure in the tableau (any resident of Augustine would have known the wispy figure of Dr. Lopez instantly) was kneeling now to open his bag and spread his instruments in a neat row. Not that Don Pablo will be needing that scalpel this morning, thought Carter. If what I hear of young Roger Pinckney is true, it'll all be over in a few seconds.

He watched the two duelists toss aside their capes and step out to the field: Pinckney, an arrogant young ramrod in his pearl-gray coat with the facings of the collar still turned confidently down; and the hulking figure of "Gumbo" Eames, the waterfront bully who had been a gentleman once, and still shot men now and again like this, for sport. Not that dueling was legal in the Floridas this year, with the territory under martial law and a murderous Indian war surging to the gates of Augustine itself. But Gumbo had ignored the law before—and vanished into the hammocks when the law proved troublesome.

Once again, Carter asked himself why the general had ordered him only to observe and to report, not to interfere.

Gumbo was staggering a little as he took his place, and Carter guessed that the man was quite as drunk as usual. He knew that it would not spoil the fellow's aim. He knew how easily Gumbo could brace himself as he turned back to back with the man he had already murdered in his heart, and how he would march down that ten paces of beach, when Dundee barked the order, as though he were strutting in some half-remembered dress-parade.

The sun burned the last of the mist away, lighting young Pinckney's face in sharp, tanned silhouette. A clean-cut face, like an intaglio from a more gallant age; a face that managed to be both serene and faintly smiling above its immaculate white stock. Once again Carter thought, He's one of the handsomest boys I've ever seen. He's too young to die, even if he is a fire-eater—even if he deserves everything he's getting now.

And then, incredulously, he grasped the truth. Pinckney was *enjoying* the moment completely, with utter disregard for the consequence—acting it to the hilt, like a hero in a melodrama of his own choosing, pacing the field in the grand manner and too absorbed in his performance to pause for fear.

The two duelists turned, as they reached the limits of their field, profiled and faced one another against the muted glow of morning. Carter's eyes froze on the long-muzzled pistol in young Pinckney's fist. It seemed too theatrical to be real, as it pointed earthward at its owner's side. His eyes marked the dull sheen of the stock, the gleam of the silver name-plate half-obscured now by the boy's long brown fingers.

"Ready, gentlemen?"

The knife-edged profiles were unstirring. A hot shaft of sunlight, escaping the fog-bank to the east, picked out the stubble on Gumbo Eames' jawbone. Pinckney, Carter noted, was beautifully shaved. Merely by discarding his spurs, he might have stepped off into a quadrille.

Grady, in his nest of marsh-grass, said softly, "Any bets, Captain? I'll give two-to-one on Charleston."

There was no time for a rebuke, or even for a scowl. Dundee's arm, like a symbolic flail, whipped the handkerchief down as he barked the order to fire. Even as he watched Gumbo's pistol-hand come up, Carter knew that Pinckney had fired first. The double report was all but simultaneous, but the boy's reflexes had been faster by a split second. Enough to set Gumbo's knees buckling, with a bullet in his brain. The terror of the St. Augustine waterfront was still staring at his opponent, with a look of almost comic dismay, when his tendons gave in earnest and his body spread-eagled on the sand.

No one stirred but the little doctor, who scurried to his work. Dundee's pause was just long enough to be decent, before he went back for his man's cloak, tossed it about Pinckney's shoulders, and glanced inquiringly at Gumbo's second. Evidently, there was no disposition there to take up the quarrel. The other man had knelt beside the body before Dundee could turn coolly away.

On one knee now, the other second remembered to raise his hat as the victors made their final bows. Pinckney looked incuriously at his own tall beaver for a bullet hole, and left the field without even a backward glance. The beaver was back on his head, set at a rakish angle, when he mounted his horse in the cedar grove. Dundee followed him with a flourish.

Before the hoof-beats died, Dr. Lopez had already risen from the body, and was turning down his sleeves.

GRADY said, with a respectful twinkle, "I tried to get him to bet on it, sir, but the captain believed the stories—"

The general rumbled with laughter. The general was usually in a good humor after his second cup of coffee. Neither Carter nor his sergeant remarked that the general owed the luxury of real coffee to the generosity of a visiting fire-eater from Charleston. Brevet-captains do not speak of such matters to their commanding officers, especially when they have been invited to his quarters for breakfast.

Grady said, "It wasn't a two-way quarrel, sir. But of course, Gumbo didn't know that. I saw it start myself. Yesterday at dusk, it was, when Gumbo rolled out of that *bodega* on the square, and ran into our young sprout, head-on. And got himself knocked into the gutter for his rudeness. Gumbo hasn't been knocked off his feet often these past years, and there was a crowd watching. Next thing you knew, there were cards out, and the place named—"

"Is that how they do things in the South, Carter?" said the general.

Carter said, carefully, "I wouldn't know, sir. So far, no one has challenged *me*."

"Most of Augustine has watched you at pistol practice, sir," said Grady. "If you ask me, that's pretty good insurance. Even if you could fight a native, in that coat."

Carter ignored the compliment. He was usually suspicious of Grady, when the sergeant was in a flowery mood. It meant that Grady and the general had been having a conference of their own—with Brevet-Captain John Carter as the chief item on the agenda. Seven times out of ten, it meant that a mission was afoot for which that same young captain would have little stomach.

So Carter said only, "Why didn't you let me stop 'em, sir?"

"Settling arguments with pistols is an old custom down here," said the general. "I don't like to stop it, even when I've the right."

"Forgive me, sir, but isn't this young man in our charge?"

"Unofficially, he's attached to my staff. But he's not in uniform, praise heaven! That means he can fight his way into mischief—and out again." The general parted his considerable whiskers with a flourish and let out the kind of crooked smile that Carter had learned to distrust on sight. "To be frank, Jack, it might have saved us both trouble if young Pinky had been hurt this morning, instead of Gumbo—"

"Forgive me, sir, but I thought—"

"That his father's a senator? Right. That he sent the boy to me to be tamed? Right again. Just how would *you* handle a hellion of twenty who could shoot pennies from a slave's hand ever since he was old enough to lift a derringer?"

"I'd refuse the job, sir."

The general let his whiskers fall again. "I can say this to old friends, Jack. My job here isn't dependent on military skill alone. Young hotspur's father is close to the Secretary of War. Much too close for comfort, if you ask me—"

"Then I'd take the job, sir—and handle it my way."

"That's my bargain, Jack. *Carte blanche*, as you West Point beaux would say. That's why I sent you and Grady into the marsh-grass—to have a look at our boy in action."

Carter stumped over to the window, and stared down at the courtyard of the dusty St. Francis Barracks. This comfortable, disheveled room had been the scene of more than one crisis when he had battled the general over the details of a tour-of-duty, and lost. The tall sentry in the faded blue-and-white dress uniform, patroling the cobbled entrance of St. George Street, was part of the background, along with the pyramid of rusty cannon-balls left over from the Spanish occupation and the scrawled hieroglyphs on the gatepost, which Carter had tried to decipher in moments of boredom. Grady had said that they were the initials of English dragoons, carved there when Florida was a colony of the British crown.

Grady recalled himself to Carter now. "It's

hard to believe that Pinky's only twenty. They say he's pistoled fourteen men, and come out with just two flesh wounds. Fifteen, if you count Gumbo. If you ask me, sir, I don't think we should add that redneck to the score. His death was more like suicide."

The general said, "I've heard that the boy has shot a man for each year of his life. At least ten of 'em died because they insisted on using that nickname."

"Pinky, sir?" said the sergeant.

"Pinky, indeed! You saw him drill Gumbo, both of you. D'you doubt he's brave, at least?"

"Bravery's a strange thing, sir," said Carter. "Sometimes it's only another name for animal spirits. Like Gumbo's, for instance. I doubt he had enough brains to be afraid. Or Pinky—pardon me, my current chore—"

The general was bellowing with laughter now. "Glad you catch on so fast, Jack!"

"I'd say he was raised in a false school, sir. That he was too sure of his manners, and his pistol arm, to know what fear means. To say nothing of the thrill of playing tag with death. Any small boy knows the feeling—when he climbs too high in a tree or swims beyond his depth in surf. Magnify that and you have this game Pinky is playing."

"RIGHT again, Jack. How can we make our boy grow up?"

Carter smiled thinly. "As you know, Grady and I are going south tomorrow—"

"My idea, exactly."

"To fight Coacoochee, sir—on his own home ground."

"Then why not take young Pinckney along?"

Carter exploded. "He'll lose his hair, and worse!"

"He'll see the Territory, too. That's why he came, Jack. Remember, he can break us all, if he doesn't enjoy his visit."

"Suppose I don't bring him back?"

"Then he has only himself to blame. He requested to be taken, didn't he, Grady?"

The sergeant was beaming now. "If you ask me, sir, he's a nice young man. A bit spoiled, but—"

"I'm not asking you," snapped Carter. "How many drinks has he bought you, Sergeant?"

"Enough to start a whole Indian powwow, sir. You might say he was sounding me out—about you, of course. Whether you were the sort of officer who'd enjoy his company in bivouac—"

"Does he know what a bivouac means in this climate?"

"To hear him tell it, sir, he's been twice with wagon-trains to Texas."

Carter looked straight at the general. "Is that what we're grooming him for now, sir—the Texas war?"

"Never mind the future, Jack. We've a few thousand Indians to round up first, right here in the Floridas. It's going to be right hard to tell the senator you refused to include his boy in that party."

Carter gave in, as always, with a shrug that translated itself into a ramrod-stiff salute just before the general could bristle.

"Does he come with me in uniform, sir?"

"Be reasonable, Jack. Will any of you be wearing uniforms, when you're in the scrub?"

"Perhaps not, sir. I was thinking of orders—discipline—"

"Roger Pinckney is under my command," said the general. "When he rides down to the inlet with you tomorrow, he'll be under yours, until you release him. Is that definite enough?"

Carter did not budge. "Of course, if I can train him my own way—"

"If anyone at all can train him." The general walked over to the window and looked down at his dusty dress-parade. "He's in your hands, and Grady's. Bring him back alive, if you can."

"And if we can't, sir?"

"Then there's one hot-head less in the world—and one more hero."

There was a brave beat of hooves on the cobbles outside the barracks gate. Carter turned to the window in time to see their man ride into the parade, toss his bridle to a black boy, and dismount with a flourish. Pinckney was still wearing his tall beaver and his pearl-gray coat. To the captain's starved eyes, he was a fashion-plate come true.

The boy raised his glance to the window and swept off his hat in a low bow. Carter felt his neck bristle, though he could find no overtone of satire in that courtesy. Roger Pinckney's smile had been utterly candid; the hot brown eyes that had met his own were wide with friendliness—and hope. It seemed incredible that this stripling had faced one of Florida's toughest bullies a scant hour ago, knowing in advance that he could put a bullet between his eyes.

The general came back to his desk, as Pinckney went through the archway. "It seems he's put Dundee on the packet by now. Will you take over and give him your orders?"

"Suppose he asks for you, sir?"

"Any moment now," said the general, "I'll be meeting with the citizens' committee, to go into Gumbo's death. Of course, we won't investigate too far. Most of them are glad there's a redneck less in Augustine." He reached regretfully for his uniform coat. "One thing more, Jack. Remember not to call him Pinky—and don't let him get you mad."

"I'll do my best, sir, but—"

"You must do more than that," said the general. "Remember, *you* can't shoot him in a duel. If he kills you, that's one ending; if you kill him, that's the end of all of us. Besides, I'd much rather have you bring me back a soldier."

The general cuffed Carter's shoulder and

went out with a parting wink for Grady. The sergeant said, "One tour of duty in the scrub cured you, sir. Why not him?"

"This is no time to bring up my past, Grady."

"It made you a soldier, sir. It made you see that war means working together, not shooting thing out on your own. Why not him?"

"Stand back, Grady," snapped Carter. "I'll handle this."

Then he braced his shoulders and faced the doorway, as the orderly knocked to announce the arrival of Roger Pinckney, Esquire.

CHAPTER II

THE DECOY

FIVE days later, on the broad ribbon of beach, miles south of Matanzas Inlet, Carter's shoulders were braced just as tautly, and the job of taming Pinky was still unsolved.

Carter had long since stripped to his smallclothes for the job of beachcombing. So, for that matter, had Grady and the twenty-odd regulars under his command. Carter could feel reasonably proud of his hard, tanned body, as he squared away from the target Grady had planted just above the water-line and sent another pistol bullet through the pine-splinter at the top. Then Pinky, slender as a dancer and tanned as any leatherneck, squared off in turn and blew the next splinter to bits.

The boy, Carter reflected, had been utterly at home with them from the start. He glanced back now at the men, sprawled for their noontide rest in the doubtful shadow of a dune. All of them whooped in unison, as Pinky scored his fifth bull's-eye. Carter remembered that none of them had cheered just now, when *he* had scored his fourth. Pinky had been one of them from the moment he had dismissed horse and body-servant at the Matanzas ford and waded into the ooze along the far bank to begin the march. Pinky, to put it frankly, had been too friendly to resist.

Even then, the boy had been dressed for the part: loose-fitting hunting clothes, a broad planter's hat, double bandoliers. Carter had offered no protest when he loaded an extra rifle on the pack-mule, along with the inevitable mahogany box that contained his pistols. After all, they were going down the southern beaches to hunt Indians: extra arms and ammunition were essential.

As for their target practice now—well, that had a purpose, too, and he would explain it to his charge at once. Providing Coacoochee's war-party didn't bring their own answer out of the dunes in the meantime.

"Well done, Mr. Pinckney," he snapped. Then he profiled to the target, drew a taut bead on the next splinter in line—and missed it clean.

The young man said pleasantly, "You must trust my pistol, Captain. It never throws high." He made his point promptly, sighting down his own barrel and sending Carter's splinter to oblivion.

"Another round, sir?"

Carter said, "I think we've advertised our presence here enough." He faced back to his command, glad to note that no one had cheered this time. A quick eye checked Simpson and Grady, still on lookout, just below the clump of Spanish bayonets that grew in the cleft of the dunes. From this vantage point they could survey the flat palmetto scrub behind the dunes, and the wall of jungle hammock that blocked the western horizon.

Pinky said, with a debonair quirk of one brow, "Don't tell me the hostiles can hear our fire, Captain?"

"They're nearer than you think. Much nearer."

"Your servant, sir. And your pardon. But it's hard to believe."

Carter found he was smiling, for the first time in days. So the boy was repeating his own pattern of doubt, after all. He glanced up at the shadowed dune, and saw that each of the men was resting with his extra rifle beside him, and a weather eye on Grady or Simpson. The single, lazy wave of the millpond Atlantic curled to meet him as he took a long stride to the sea-damp sand where their target stood. A gull wheeled above them, etching the silence with its raucous cry. Of course, young Pinckney had logic on his side, and the evidence of his senses. It was hard enough for Carter himself to remember that death might be creeping toward them now, through that sun-steeped weariness of afternoon.

He said, with no effort at drama, "Five years ago, I lost my first man on just such an afternoon. A Negro guide named Mozo. We'd been walking through a powder-dry savannah, with no sign of life for miles. All at once, I turned and found him kicking in the dust beside me, with an arrow in his throat."

Pinckney said, "I thought the Seminoles had outgrown arrows, sir."

But Carter had already squatted on his knees on the hard-packed sand. He ignored the question as he slashed a rough outline of the coast in the damp ground between them. Using his machete as a pointer, he indicated the curve of the Matanzas to the north.

"We've marched south from this point for some time now. Have you wondered why, or do you enjoy soldiering too much to wonder?"

Pinckney said, politely, "I assumed you'd explain in time, Captain."

The machete slashed a dozen crosses in the back-country. "Those were farms: cotton, indigo, tobacco. All of them were gutted in '36, when Osceola was king-pin among the chiefs. None of them is really safe today, now that

Coacoochee has taken over Osceola's mantle."

"Will we fight Coacoochee, then?"

"Not unless we can turn into otters and swim the Big Cypress. With luck, we may tease one of his war-parties into overpowering us—" Carter grinned in earnest, as Pinckney's face went blank. "Or we can die trying, if our luck is bad."

"Did you say *overpower*, sir?"

"They'll seldom come into the open otherwise. At the moment, they're probably squatting in the wet prairie around the Oklawaha, perhaps seventy miles inland. The main body of braves, you understand. Groups of twenty to fifty have been hunting down the coast since spring, burning what they could find. Butchering a farmer's family now and again—when they've been bold enough to rebuild their farms."

PINCKNEY weighed this picture gravely. When he spoke, his voice was quite calm. "Why would they attack us on the beach?"

"The beach is the only highway east of the St. Johns. If we mean to patrol this section, we're bound to use it. The general has been sending out patrols constantly, ever since they broke the truce last fall. When the rains end, we'll go after them again in force. For the present, we kill where we can."

"How do you know they're watching us now?"

Carter nodded toward Grady, serene and yawning faintly in his buffalo-wallow high up the steep face of the dune. "My sergeant says so—and I trust his instinct. Besides, they have a reason to watch this patrol."

"I don't think I follow, sir."

"You will, in a moment. Why d'you think I've kept just seven men in uniform and had 'em march along the crests of the dunes, where they could be seen for miles? Why were the others sent on ahead at night, to rendezvous at a spot like this?"

The young man smiled out of that same grave, handsome mask. "I'm beginning to see what you mean by *overpower*, Captain."

Carter said, "Don't be too sure of the meaning. It will depend on the size of their war-party. We've walked into ambush before—with our eyes open wide—and dug in for our lives. Digging in won't be too simple this afternoon, with the Atlantic at our backs."

"Perhaps they won't attack, after all."

Carter glanced again at Grady—and marveled at the man's repose in the face of death. The sergeant seemed to feel his stare, and turned to close one eye at them both, in a slow, contented wink.

"Any minute, sir," said Grady. "I'll whistle when I need you."

Pinckney spoke in the same easy whisper. "You've *seen* them, Sergeant?"

"Just one bonnet, on the edge of the swamp. Big as a turkey buzzard."

The new recruit started up the dune on the run. Carter, without rising, put out the blade of his machete and tripped the boy neatly.

"*Stay where you are, Pinky!*" There was a whiplash in his next whisper, as the boy groped to his feet. "That's an order."

"But, Captain—"

"I know you've a duelist's eye," said Carter. "You need more, to find a Seminole in his habitat."

"But, Captain!" The boy stood blazing in the loose sand above.

Carter rocked on his heels and waited for the challenge that did not quite take shape.

"Come back where you belong," he said at last. "I haven't finished my lecture yet."

Roger Pinckney spoke with perfect politeness, though his cheeks still burned. "With the Captain's permission, I'll resent this properly—at the proper time."

"With the proper weapons?"

"The Captain has given me the choice, I think."

"The Captain accepts your thrown glove," said Carter. "Now will you stop dancing a ballet, and get back to soldiering?"

The general would never approve. He would, in fact, turn the air blue with his cursing, if he knew the risk his aide was taking. And yet, in that flash, the plan had sprung full-blown in Carter's brain: the sort of medicine that would cure Roger Pinckney of his operatic manner, even if this afternoon failed.

Pinckney said, "Your servant, sir. What are your orders?"

"At the moment, I've only one. If the attack comes, stay under cover. I've used you long enough for a decoy."

Once more, the boy's eyes blazed into his. Carter saw that the epithet hurt him no less because he had not quite grasped its meaning. He said levelly, "Coacoochee is well-informed by friends in Augustine. He knows that you marched out with me from the Inlet five days ago. A senator's son would fetch a good ransom—if Coacoochee is after ransom this spring. Or he might be planning to use you for medicine at the council fire. Shall I tell you how they divide a white man's heart and liver, when they're preparing for battle?"

Carter waited patiently, but the boy did not flinch. Pinckney said only, "If I'm a decoy, sir, you should use me to that end."

His face was still a hard mask; Carter could not be sure if there was fear behind it, or simple disbelief. "The general told me all about you," he said slowly. "You graduated from the Point with honors, but you couldn't take orders from above. That's why you left the army, to raise your own brand of Cain in Charleston. Until you were sent to the Floridas, in the hope you'd learn a trade at last—even if it was

only the trade of war. It will be a useful trade, when your time comes to go West again to help open Texas for your father's money and his slaves—"

"Must we discuss my father, Captain?"

"Only because it's part of my job to serve him. I'll make you a soldier, Pinky, if I die trying."

THE boy smiled thinly. "Suppose I don't like your rules?"

"Wars aren't fought by rules. That's the first thing you unlearn, after you've left the Point. Do you think those red maniacs are following any known brand of logic now? D'you think *I'm* being logical, keeping you under cover when I could use you to draw their fire?"

"Haven't you done that for five days, Captain?"

"The danger wasn't real until now."

"Why didn't you tell me of this sooner?"

"Frankly, I thought you'd crack after your first taste of wilderness. Or at least, admit that someone knew a little about Indian-fighting—even if it was only I."

Pinckney said, quietly, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, sir. But I'm not in the habit of cracking, as you put it."

"Aren't you, Pinky? We'll see about that, any moment now. Perhaps this will be the first real test you've ever had."

"I don't like your tone, sir!"

"But you see my point, don't you? Before, you had an audience for your killing—and enough skill to make certain you'd be on hand to take a bow. Today, for the first time, you're fighting with a team, and no audience. I'll break you to that team, or die trying!"

Carter found that he, and not Pinky, was getting angry. It was a luxury to let his anger rip. A man had a right to anger after too many moments like this, too many breathless eternities of waiting to join battle with an invisible enemy.

Pinckney said, "I'm sorry you make the alternative so hard for yourself, Captain. You'll never break me. Therefore, it's quite likely that I'll kill you when this business is over—"

Grady whistled softly from the shoulder of the dune. Carter said, "Shall we finish this business first, and settle our quarrel later?"

Pinckney stayed calmly beside him as he went up the dune to peer through the green shield of Spanish bayonets. The enemy had reached the end of the scrub now, and had begun to show themselves boldly. Carter counted at least forty Seminoles, the chiefs bonneted with garish flamingo and aigrette feathers, the braves daubed with green mud to their eyes. All of them were creeping forward on hands and knees, nursing the last scrap of cover. It was evident that they would rush the landward slope of the dune at any moment now, confident of taking the patrol by surprise and assuming, as Carter had hoped they would, that a mere handful of militia was resting here and amusing each other with a little pistol-practice before resuming their march.

Pinckney said, "Two to one, Captain. With extra bandoliers, that makes us even."

Sand scuffed into Carter's eyes as the boy got to his feet. Grady rolled quickly to tackle Pinky's legs—just a fraction too late. The boy had already run over the shoulder of the dune and stood now on the peak to scan the western horizon. In that flash, the war-party had plunged for cover to a man. The flat sea of palmettos shimmered with heat-mirage, empty (as far as Pinckney's eye could discern) as the face of the moon.

The boy spoke in a whisper, through set lips, "Stay where you are, please. Both of you. If they really want me—shouldn't I go down to meet them?"

He took a tentative step, and then another, down the landward slope of the dune, shading his eyes again to scan the palmetto-plain. To the Seminoles, he was the young tyro who had climbed over the dunes for a look-see—nothing more. Despite himself, Carter had to admit that that part of Pinky's performance was ideal. He turned to give an order, and saw that Grady had anticipated him. The men below him had already begun to fan down the dune, scrambling to their mission like active land-crabs. There was a brush-choked gully to the south and another a hundred yards to the north. Perhaps the Indians had intended to use them in their assault. In any case, they would serve admirably for the two-pronged flanking movement that his regulars were already executing by instinct.

Grady said, "If that young fool can hold their eyes, and their fire—"

Neither of them spoke again, as Pinky went toward the first clump of palmettos, taking his time. Carter sucked in his breath when the boy unlimbered his breech-loading English rifle, and drew a bead on a circling gull. A flash of fire, he knew, would either bring the enemy up in a rush, or send them scuttling back to the hammock for another attempt. At the moment, they seemed confident of their ambush, and equally confident that they could snare this unwary stroller when they chose—so confident that they let him walk halfway up the dune again after he had lowered his rifle without firing.

Pinckney spoke once more, through tight lips. Carter could just hear the whispered words. "How long will it take to surround them, Captain?"

"Come back where you belong, idiot!"

"Be just, sir. Admit I'm a perfect decoy."

On that note, Pinky sat down, just out of reach of Grady's simian arm. For breath-taking minutes, he cleaned the breech of his rifle,

making a thorough job of it and sighting lovingly down the barrel when he had finished. Despite his rage, Carter found himself watching the scrub now, rather than the boy. Five years of just this type of hunting assured him that their quarry had not stirred from cover. By the same token, he knew an arrow might sing through Pinky's body at any moment.

PERHAPS his first guess had been accurate; perhaps Coacoochee, in the dim fastness of the swamp, had ordered them to bring the boy to him alive. It was still a fearful risk for Pinky to be taking—even though the success of their maneuver grew more assured with each passing moment.

Grady said, "Bowlegs is leading the party, sir. I saw his ugly mug just before they hit the dirt. He must have ordered 'em to hold back."

Carter nodded grimly. He, too, had caught a brief glimpse of Charley Bowlegs, the *mestizo* who had led more than one of Coacoochee's raids on the outskirts of the settlements. Like many breeds, Bowlegs had lived in Augustine when peace negotiations were in progress between the Army and the chiefs. It was only logical that he would recognize Pinky as an outlander and guess that he was the object of their attack.

But Carter forgot to wrestle with Indian logic when the bird-call sounded in the scrub—the raucous, crazy scream of the jay, a Seminole signal for attack. The Seminoles, of course, did not know that this time it was Corporal Simpson who had signaled to them to rise—nor that Simpson, with ten of the best rifle-shots in Florida, had glided silently down their flank, while the other regulars performed a similar snake-wriggle in the scrub to the north.

Grady shot the first brave through the heart as the war-party surged up the dune, almost to a man; Grady, cool as ever in this crisis, rolled to the loaded rifle beside him, sighted carefully, and fired again. The first volley from the scrub roared out then, drowning the second shot: the Seminoles, staggered by the unexpected attack from flank and rear, turned in

Carter snapped a second pistol from its lanyard and vaulted over the spine of the dune, knocking young Pinckney flat.

time to meet the second volley from the north.

Carter found that he had emptied both barrels of his derringer without conscious thought. He snapped a second pistol from its lanyard and vaulted over the spine of the dune, knocking young Pinckney flat with one lunge of his arm. The boy rolled clear, and got to one knee again, snapping his fine English rifle to his shoulder. Even in the excitement of the moment, Carter had time to watch Charley Bowlegs drop like a grotesque brown squirrel as he

popped from cover at last and came into Pinky's sights. The Seminoles had found time to fire their first round, a scattered volley that bit harmlessly into the scrub now that the regulars had dropped flat to reload. Grady came over the top of the dune, clubbing his musket for the final rush. They made it together, with Pinckney whooping like a blind dervish beside them.

The regulars' next volley, raking the reeling red charge from two sides, broke up the last of the abortive battle. Taken from the rear when they had expected to surprise an enemy ahead, the Indians turned tail and ran like leaderless sheep. Carter jumped one of the hostiles in the first palmetto-clump and hacked him into the earth with a flailing machete. Behind and above him, the English breech-loader cracked twice again; the crash of palmettos told him that Pinky had scored two more bull's-eyes. The regulars were moving in from all sides now, swinging their clubbed muskets in rhythm with Grady's.

Carter paused to draw breath and saw it was all over, almost as soon as it had begun. Half of the hostiles lay sprawled on the white slope of the dune; the others were dead or dying in the palmettos, as Grady and his men moved into the pitiless work. Carter paused to stare down at the fallen Bowlegs, and noted that Pinky had drilled him between the eyes, as neatly as he had finished Gumbo Eames.

He was still considering the dead Indian when Roger Pinckney came up with shining eyes. One glance at the boy was the only answer he needed. Once again, he realized that Pinky had enjoyed himself far too much to be afraid.

Pinky said, a little breathlessly, "At the Point, Captain, we'd call that a double envelopment. I hope you'll admit it was both brilliant and successful."

Carter stared at him without a word—and then struck him hard across the mouth with the flat of one hand. The force of the blow sent the rifle spinning from the boy's hand, and Carter set one heel upon the stock before he could recover.

"Give me your belt, Simpson. This man ignored an order. He must be flogged."

He heard the men around them draw their breath in wonder. The hush that followed told him that he was still in command, that no flush of victory could blunt the discipline he had imposed on this hand-picked troop. Despite the slithery sand, Simpson's heels clicked like a pistol-shot as he pulled off his broad leather belt and presented it. There wasn't even a snicker when Simpson grabbed hurriedly at his dungarees to avoid a sudden exposure.

Roger Pinckney said, "As an officer and a gentleman, Captain—"

"You may be a gentleman, Mr. Pinckney. At this moment, you're a militiaman without uniform, and under my orders. Will you step behind this dune with me, or must I punish you before the command?"

Pinckney did not stir. Carter made the belt snap in mid-air like a vicious blacksnake, and smiled thinly as the boy turned at last and walked into the shelter of the dune. The smile, he admitted privately, was only a facade to cover his true feelings; in his heart, he yearned to let out a whoop of joy that would have matched one of Pinky's in vigor.

Following the boy around the high white shoulder of sand, Carter told himself that the pretext would do as well as another. In any event, it was polite for an officer to turn his back at a time like this—if only to permit his men to take scalps in comfort.

THE boy stood waiting for him with his heels together, deep in the shadow of the dune. His arms were folded high on the brown barrel of his chest. Save for the skin-tight small-clothes, he might have passed for a bronze from a more heroic age—a dynamic figure who had not had time to raise a drop of sweat in his first pitched battle. Carter knew that his own bare torso was dank with wet powder-stains. The comparison did not help his temper as he tossed Corporal Simpson's belt aside.

"Don't worry, Mr. Pinckney. I won't assert my authority now that we're alone. That backhanded slap was only to impress the men. You may take it as confirmation of our meeting, when we've crossed the Matanzas again."

The boy said stiffly, "When may I expect that honor?"

"We must collect our wounded before I answer that. A six-day march should bring us to the Inlet, if they're all walking cases. Can you bear to be under my orders that long?"

Pinckney said, "The pleasure's mine, sir, if I may look forward to satisfaction afterwards."

"You insist on pistols?"

"I do."

"May I select the ground?"

Pinky said, "That, of course, is your privilege."

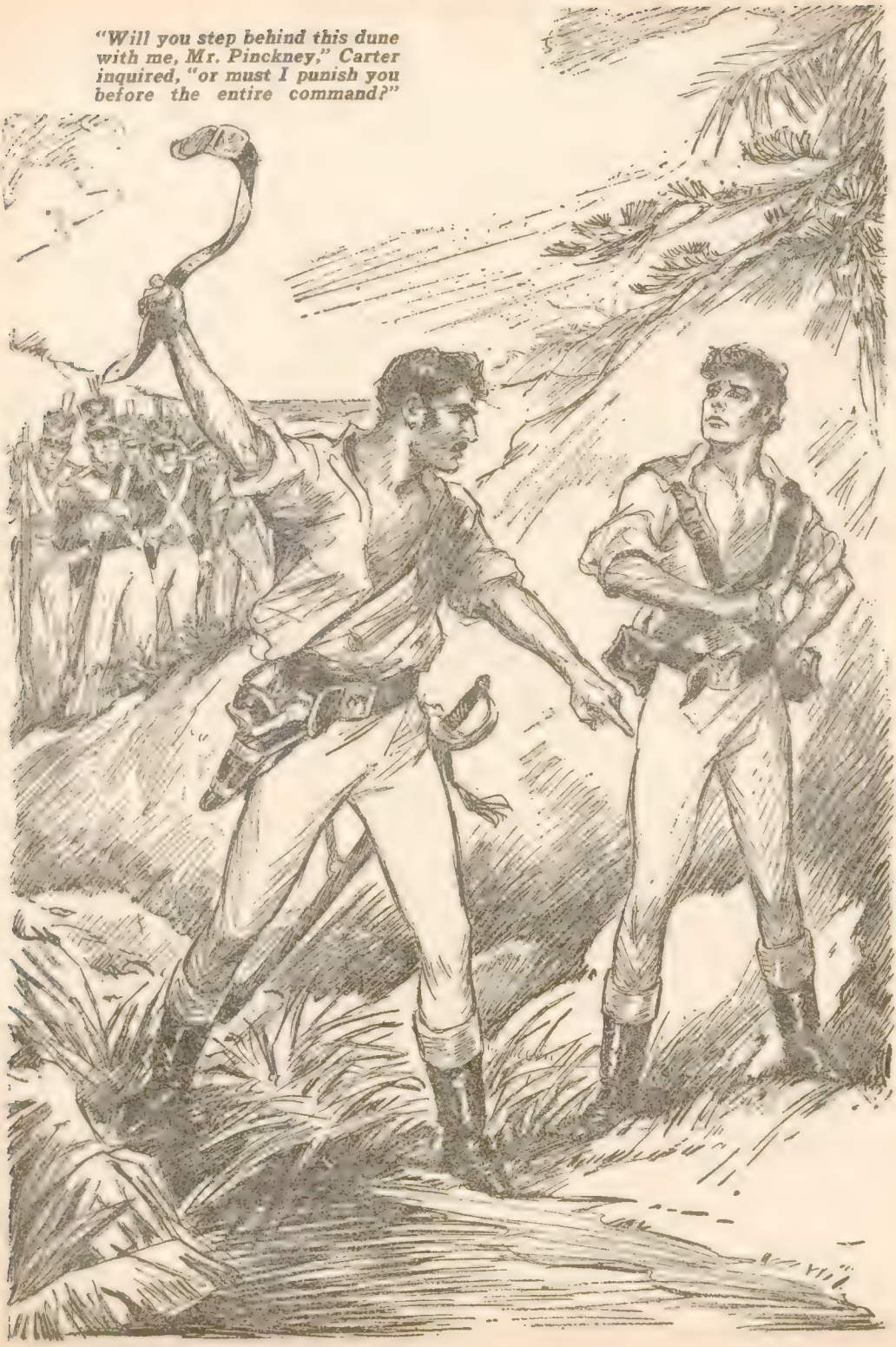
Carter smiled again. He had not expected this part of his stratagem to go over so readily. "Very good, sir. We'll meet the moment our march is over, on the mangrove island just north of Matanzas Inlet."

"And our seconds?"

"This kind of duel won't require seconds. Grady will conduct you to the ground at the proper time. Quite unofficially, you understand. I'll be out of uniform when we meet—"

"I don't think I follow you, Captain."

"Permit me to tell this my way, please. Remember, you're still under orders." Carter picked up Simpson's belt and cracked it twice, for the sake of listening ears beyond the dune.



"Will you step behind this dune with me, Mr. Pinckney," Carter inquired, "or must I punish you before the entire command?"

"We're agreed on the weapons and the meeting-place. You will now have six days to plan your strategy for a real wilderness duel."

The boy's face had changed at last; Carter saw that he had grasped the picture he was building so carefully. He let his voice ride on above Pinky's half-uttered protest. "Interrupt me once again, sir, and I *will* have you flogged. For six days, as I just said, you'll march alone. With your hands bound, and your neck tethered to the pack-mule. You will sleep and eat alone. Any man who exchanges a word with you will be fined a day's pay. That punishment is in force until we reach the inlet. Believe me, it's not at all severe—when you disobey an order under fire."

Pinky said, in a strangled whisper, "I accept the rebuke, Captain."

"Good. I took a catamount into the wilderness. Perhaps I'll bring back a soldier. The general, and your father, will both be pleased."

"Not if I kill you when we're out of uniform."

"Perhaps I won't be that easy to kill. I'm nearly the marksman you are now. Grady will give me four-to-one on the ground I've chosen."

"With your permission, I'll cover Sergeant Grady's money."

"Indeed, Mr. Pinckney? And just how expert are you at swamp-hunting?"

The picture was complete now. Carter stepped back a pace: it was gratifying to watch the boy's face change in earnest, to realize that he was shaken at last. Roger Pinckney was a Southern gentleman, after all. He had obviously heard of swamp-duels before, even if he had never fought one.

"So it's to be a two-way manhunt, sir?"

"Precisely. In our case, hunters and hunted will be one and the same. The ground I've picked is a mangrove island perhaps two miles square. Most of it is knee-deep in ooze at high tide; all of it was green jungle long before Eve was a wishbone." Watching the boy, Carter began to enjoy himself completely. "Grady will take you to one side of that island at dawn. I'll be waiting on the other. When we're both properly placed, Grady will row into the Matanzas and fire a signal. Which means that both of us are to start for high ground at the center of the island. . . . Whoever gains it first, of course, will have the advantage of an ambush."

He paused on that, letting the picture sink in. Pinckney's face was still masklike in its calm, but the lips were ashen. He permitted himself one more question.

"Do we hunt with dogs, or without them?"

"No seconds, no dogs and no audience," said Carter cheerfully. "Just us, Mr. Pinckney—plus one of your dueling-pistols. Shall we carry a single charge, or would you prefer extra ammunition?"

"A single charge will do, I think."

"So do I." Carter took a step up the dunes, as Grady shouted for orders beyond. "We understand each other, then?"

"Completely."

"You've no wish to withdraw your challenge?"

The color had come back into the boy's face. "D'you take me for a coward, sir?"

"Not yet. I hope I'll have no cause to change my opinion."

He watched the boy's fists double, as his nerves snapped at last. Sidestepping the headlong rush, Carter tripped his antagonist for the second time that afternoon. As Pinckney went down on hands and knees, he dropped beside him to flail home a stunning blow at the base of his skull. Pinky collapsed face-downward on the sand, and Carter—still smiling—got up to shout for water, and a length of rawhide.

When the boy had wavered to his feet again, his arms were neatly lashed from wrist to elbow. A length of rope connected him, not too painfully, with the pack-straps of the Army mule that still waited in the shadow of the dune—a patient figure that had long taken war and the brawls of men in its stride, a stolid but essential part of war, that could be counted on to ignore a young man's vainglory for six days now, as he marched down the beach to Augustine.

Carter did not pause to check on his punishment detail; at the moment, there was more essential business waiting on the far side of the dunes. He found that he was humming a wordless tune as he went to confer with Grady. The general would never approve, of course. But the general had asked for a soldier: he could hardly quarrel with the method if it brought back results.

CHAPTER III

MENACE IN THE MANGROVES

THE mist cleared a little, under the lazy puff of air that swept through the Matanzas estuary from the open sea. Grady spun the skiff's bow and leaned hard on the oars to bear down on the shoreline that had begun to take shape against the pale promise of morning. Grady had worked hard in the hour before dawn, but he still had a smile for Carter as the skiff grounded in the muddy shallows.

"Of course, you know best, sir—"

Carter, at ease in the stern-sheets, babied one of Roger Pinckney's dueling-pistols—and wondered if its owner's heart were thudding, too, across that dimly-seen waste of swampy island.

"If you've any criticism of my strategy, Grady—"

"Only this, Captain. Don't give yourself time to think this over. I'm sure Pinky won't."

"You're forgetting our young man's back-

ground. Neither of us is to move until you fire your warning from the river."

"Suppose he gets jumpy?"

"Even so, I won't mind. He'll have more time to lose his way."

"It's pleasant to see you so confident, Captain. Just the same, I wish I'd set *you* ashore first, then him."

Carter said severely, "You haven't grasped my purpose, Grady. To say nothing of my ethics."

The sergeant heaved his bulk overside. Waist-deep in silt and marsh-grass, he began to work the skiff toward solid ground. "Ethics, sir? That's a big word for me. Especially before breakfast."

"When this is quite over, the boy must have no complaints. Now that he's waiting on the north shore, he'll remember he had his chance. If you'd beached me ahead of him, he might suspect collusion."

Grady said patiently, "A little collusion wouldn't come amiss, sir. Not if he gets the jump on you in the open."

It was a familiar argument, and Carter let it go on without comment. Grady had been worrying, in this same vein, ever since Carter had confided his plan. Granted the sergeant had done yeoman's service, on that grueling return march, to make sure that young Pinckney's isolation was complete. When a soldier has marched for six days with no company but an Army mule, when he has bivouacked each night in embarrassing proximity to that same beast, he has had ample time to meditate on the importance of discipline. Grady had made doubly sure that Pinky's meditations were complete. When the morning's march began, the mule was permitted to trail them by as much distance as safety permitted; in the noontime halt, Grady had staked out the animal's lead-rope without even a glance for his appendage.

Pinckney—and here, Carter could only bow his head—had borne his punishment in a proud silence that held no hint of either stolidity or shame. When the column had forded the Matanzas at last, Grady had cut his bonds without comment; when Pinky's body-servant had met them, halfway down the long road to Augustine, the boy was one with the marching column again, quite as though nothing had happened. But Carter could guess at his thoughts when their glances met, just before they crossed the San Sebastian bridge.

He had kept his own voice quite calm. "Sergeant Grady will call at your lodgings about four, Mr. Pinckney. Will that be too early to suit you?"

The boy had saluted without a word. His eyes were still dark enigmas as he mounted his horse and rode toward St. Augustine with his slave. Remembering the flourish of that departure, Carter wondered if he were shivering now, in the fever-mist on the island's far shore. If not, he would do his best to bring on just such an attack before the day was too far advanced.

Grady leaned both elbows on the skiff's gunwale. "Pardon me, Captain, but you can walk now, without sinking much below your knees."

Carter tested the sergeant's statement gingerly. The viscous mud of the riverbank sucked almost to his boot-tops as he floundered toward the first of the mangroves that stood like gray ghosts in the uncertain light of morning. Grady, who could have passed for a reluctant mud-hen from the armpits down, rocked back into the skiff again—not at all reluctantly.

"Affairs of honor are all very well for gentlemen, sir. Sergeants should keep clear of 'em."

Carter hoisted himself to a mangrove root. "You're keeping clear, Grady. In fact, you're heading for mid-river now, to give us our signal. I want Mr. Pinckney to dive into this muck while it's still gray—and clammy."

Grady dipped his oars. "When shall I call back for you, Captain?"

"Not before noon. Pull up in the sun at the Inlet, and peel off that mud." Carter had already scooped a handful of that same mud from the space between the mangrove roots; now he began to daub his face and body methodically. Grady nodded his approval, as he poled the skiff toward deeper water.

"A few twigs on top of that, sir, and you're one with the landscape."

"D'you suppose Pinky will think of this, too?"

"I hope not, Captain. That way, you'll never find each other."

Carter smiled under his blue-green mask. "When will you trust me out of your sight, Sergeant?"

"Sorry to sound gloomy, sir. But I'm remembering those six bull's-eyes."

Carter froze, between the bole of the mangrove and a spray of wild-grape. The sergeant, letting his skiff turn with the tide, rested on his oars.

"Be honest, Grady. Could you be sure I was alive, if you looked this way now."

"Not if Pinky saw you too, sir."

The tide spun the skiff in earnest. Still frozen in his doubtful ambush of grape-leaves, Carter watched his sergeant vanish around the mangrove point.

HE felt that he was calm enough when he heard Grady's signal from the river—the bark of an old service pistol, muted by the clinging mist. Plunging instantly into the sucking torment of the mud, vaulting to the next mangrove to plunge again, Carter wondered if Roger Pinckney had also been released by an invisible spring.

There was no time to ask himself another

question: why had he obeyed the rules and waited? This whole mad episode, after all, had been planned as a cure for Pinky, not as a duel. With that in mind, he'd had every right to hurry to high ground and prepare his therapy in advance. As Grady had intimated, Pinky's sharp eyes might penetrate his disguise at any moment: if so, the curative process would become a duel in a twinkling. Unless Pinky saw him first, of course. In that case assassination was a better word than duel.

A quarter-mile inland, the tangle of wild grape thinned a trifle, permitting him an occasional parklike glimpse of the ground beyond. He saw blue gum and cabbage palms now, in place of the water oak and mangrove; there was even the distant, wind-twisted top of a cedar, to show where the Matanzas ooze was replaced by coquina outcrop at the island's spine. But the mud still clung cruelly to his boot-tops. Once again, he shied quickly to avoid the whispering black coil of a moccasin.

At least, he had chosen the south side of the island deliberately, remembering that he would strike high ground more quickly on that side. Even if his footing was agile, Pinky would still be floundering in waist-deep mud as he fought his way inland. Assuming, of course, that the boy could still tell north from south and that the lonely terror lurking in the next thicket had not already sent him diving for an ambush of his own. The last picture was well worth stressing, he reminded himself, scrambling to dry ground at last and bending almost double in his scurry toward the first palmetto clump.

The sun blazed through the screen of leaves to the east, at that precise moment. Carter crouched warily, letting his eye dwell on the contour of each tree-trunk before he darted forward a second time. He could hardly believe that Pinky had come this deep in the forest, yet he could take no chances on remaining invisible.

BEYOND, to the right, he paused on the edge of a sun-dappled glade perhaps twenty paces square. *There,* he told himself bitterly, was the sort of ground that Roger Pinckney would have chosen by instinct. There, with the tall forms of the seconds in attendance, the boy could have played out his familiar melodrama without a tremor. In a way, it would be only poetic justice to waylay him here, after he had wandered blindly in the swamp for an hour. To bring home the folly of his own game, as he staggered into clean sunlight at last, dripping with mud and sweat.

Carter smiled at the color his own melodrama was taking. Rogner Pinckney was a fire-eater who needed taming; he was not such a blind fool as that. For all he knew, the boy might be hiding in the palmettos on the far side of the glade, waiting to ambush *him.* It was all well within the rules of the deadly tag they were playing. He took a deep breath to steady the thud of his heart, and plunged into the first thicket to the left, running at top speed now to cross the spine of the island and gain the low ground beyond. He had no other choice, if he meant to double behind Pinckney and pick up his trail.

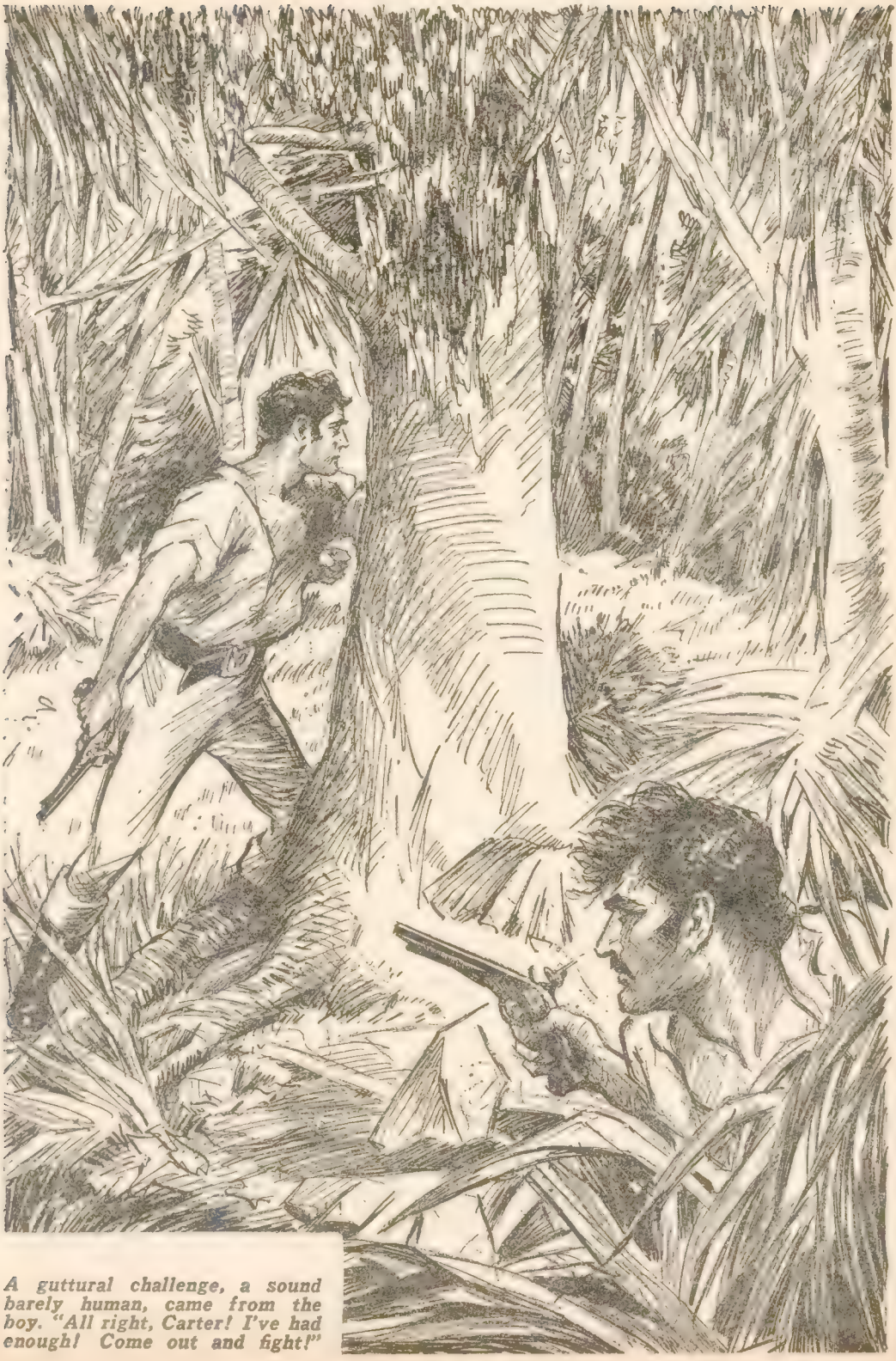
A half-hour later, he found that his breathing had steadied remarkably. Pinky, it seemed, had plunged toward his meeting like a rampaging young bull. The evidence, from snapped branches to the smear of muddy footprints, was there for a child to see, from the spot where his opponent had slithered from swamp to forest. Of course, it was just possible that Pinky had anticipated Carter's own maneuver, and had left this trail deliberately. Carter scarcely paused to weigh that chance as he picked up the next sign ahead and began stalking his man with all the stealth of a confident cat.

Now that he was moving too fast for thought, he felt oddly tranquil—even when Pinky's trail petered out on dry, open ground. Save for an occasional broken palmetto-stalk, there was no sign that the boy had passed this way: the rising sun had dried both the mud on Pinky himself and the dew-wet imprints he left behind him. For all that, Carter followed his progress with ease, up to the spine of the island, and back again, to skirt the sun-dappled glade. At first, it seemed that Pinky was zigzagging deliberately, in search of him. Then, as the trail doubled on itself once again in a thicket of water-oaks, he sensed that the boy was only fumbling for his bearings.

Before he had absorbed Grady's tutelage, Carter had lost himself in greener hells than this; it had taken courage to admit as much, with the patient sergeant beside him. What was Pinky asking himself now, as he passed that same lightning-scarred cedar for the second time, and knew that he was wandering blindly in this jungle—while Carter watched and waited?

The captain froze in his tracks and listened. The crash of Pinky's footsteps was faint but definite in the thicket to his right. Carter dove for the cedar like an agile monkey, and scrambled into the lower branches. His foot found the crotch of the trunk, and boosted him skyward, into the sanctuary of the bushy top. He made himself one with the foliage, a mere extension of the trunk that happened to have eyes—and a mud-stained dueling pistol resting in the cleft before him, in case young Pinckney's eyesight was better than his bump of direction.

The boy was all but running as he burst into view. He looked anything but debonair this morning in his torn shirt and mud-soaked pantaloons. At each step, his fine, varnished



A guttural challenge, a sound barely human, came from the boy. "All right, Carter! I've had enough! Come out and fight!"

boots sighed like animate sponges—a sound that was counter-pointed by his labored breathing.

CARTER held his breath and watched. Here, at long last, was the thing he had tried to touch and mould. Roger Pinckney was breaking under the silent threat around him; but he was not yet broken. He was, finally and definitely, afraid—but he would live to be a soldier yet, if Carter had his way. Fear, he reminded himself, is a wholesome thing, once it is faced and understood. So far, the boy had simply been too debonair, and too successful in his daring, to know its meaning. Once they had faced each other in that jungle, he would see to it that Pinckney found himself again. True, there was a risk attached, even now: the pistol clutched in that grimy fist still looked murderous enough. But it was a risk that Carter would take willingly, if it changed a crazy boy into a soldier.

He made himself one with the cedar tree, while Pinky stared about him wildly. Then, as the boy crashed away into the palmettos again, he dropped to the ground and followed.

Twice in the next half-hour, he cut across the wild circles Pinky was making, to study his fear at first hand. Again, as the boy vanished a third time in his search for the duel that would not take shape, he taunted him with a well-imitated cry of the jay—that same raucous bird-note that had launched the Indian attack. When Pinky turned, high on his toes, and brought up his pistol, when he came charging back to face his enemy at last, Carter swerved neatly and dropped like a jack-rabbit in his burrow. When Pinky had gone a hundred feet into jungle, he repeated the cry, and the quick plunge for cover.

The sun was close to the meridian when Pinky stumbled to the edge of the open glade, and fell face-down among the palmettos. He was up almost at once, his shoulders trembling. Carter, ambushed a safe three yards behind him, was hardly prepared for the guttural challenge that ripped from the boy's throat—a sound that just escaped being human, though the words were clear enough.

"All right, Carter! I've had enough! Come out and fight!"

He had not dared to hope for so prompt a victory. Again he reminded himself that the boy was young, and that the young can outgrow most things quickly, including the sense of their own omnipotence. Remembering this wryly, he reached down with careful deliberation and snapped a dry stick at his feet.

Pinky whirled toward the sound, as Carter began his quick wriggle toward the open ground. He gained his feet just as the boy plunged into the thicket to investigate, his pistol hand raised high, ready to fan down for the kill. But even now, the duelist's instinct lingered: Pinky, it seemed, was too alert to blaze away at nothing. When he found that the thicket was empty, he backed slowly toward the glade with his eyes riveted on the palmetto-clump, waiting to cover the slightest tremor of a fan. Carter, waiting in full sunlight now, backed toward the center of the open space with the boy's retreat, step by step.

"Come out, Carter! I'll give you time—"

The pistol hand lowered slowly, until the flat, curved stock of the weapon hung loosely at the boy's side—the position the duelist takes when he begins his ritualistic march. Carter, still facing the taut back, let his own pistol-hand fan slowly down, until he had drawn a bead on the slender barrel. It made a fair enough target, at ten paces. He was sure, now, that he could blast that pistol from Pinky's hand without injury—sure enough to anchor his elbow in a steel vise as he brought the sights down hard on his target.

"Come out, Carter! What are you waiting for?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Pinckney."

He squeezed the trigger before the boy could turn—and heard the pistol cough in his hand as the priming missed fire.

Carter flung the weapon aside, with an adequate curse. Pinky had already turned on his toes, with the agility of a surprised acrobat. As a man faces death in a dream, Carter saw his pistol-hand come up. The barrel was leveled at his forehead now; he could stare down it, and watch the sun make a silver splinter in the rifling. The boy's eye above the sight was as true as his aim. Somewhere in the hot, brown iris, a spark wavered and died. Still in that odd and painless dream, Carter watched the pistol sag slowly against one taut thigh.

The boy said, "Why aren't you ready?"

And Carter answered, in a tone that matched his tranquillity, "Aren't *you* about ready to admit I'm right?"

"About what?" Pinckney's voice rasped, as the pistol barrel wavered upward again. But Carter was sure of his man now. He took a step forward, lifted the pistol from the boy's stiff fingers and tossed it on the sun-bitten grass beside his own.

"Admit that you can't kill people for fun and be a soldier. Not even when your pride is hurt, Mr. Pinckney. Isn't that why you couldn't fire? Didn't you know I was right, making you march behind a mule?"

Then he stepped quietly aside as the boy broke in earnest and dropped to his knees on the ground to bury his face in his hands.

A scant hour later, they waited side by side on the shore, hip-deep in the muddy shallows, watching Grady scull in from midstream.

Carter said, gently enough, "Granted, it's hard to be brave without an audience. Someday, I'll tell you how many times I died, when you had me covered."

"I couldn't shoot you, when you were unarmed," said the boy. His voice was quite steady now. There was a note of humility there which Carter enjoyed mightily. After all, it was his creation.

The boy said, "I haven't apologized yet, sir. You haven't given me a chance—"

"Don't call me 'sir.' I'm not in uniform."

Roger Pinckney indicated the two pistols in Carter's belt. "Would you keep those as a memento, Captain?"

"Don't tell me you're through using them?"

"For the time being," said the boy. "You were right about my father—and Texas. He'll be sending me out to fight for Houston"—the hot brown eyes twinkled briefly —"providing you make the right report to the general."

"I think you can trust me that far."

"Tell me one thing before the sergeant comes. Why did you throw your pistol aside and face me that way, unarmed?"

Carter kept his face intact. He realized now that Pinckney had turned in response to his voice, without hearing the pistol-hammer click on a damp charge. That the boy had broken at last not because of the terror of the morning, though his fear had been real enough; not even because he has seen his own folly in a life-size frame, though that memory, too, would stay with him always. Roger Pinckney had come to maturity today because he had met a courage stronger than his own, and knew that he must yield to it. An enemy who could face death with empty hands and argue it out of existence . . . . Carter smiled inwardly. It was something to discover that he could act a part himself, when need arose.

He said, slowly, "Come, Mr. Pinckney. I had to prove that we Yankees can be gallant, too, when we're cornered."

The boy put out his hand, "Call me Pinky," he said. "I like it, now."

They were smiling in unison when Grady backed the tiny skiff into the shallows.

"Who'll go first, gentlemen—now we're friends again?"

"The captain, of course," said Pinky. "He has a report to make at headquarters."

Carter glanced back just once, while Grady drove the boat through the mid-channel ebb. Roger Pinckney was standing against the gray-green wall of mangroves with folded arms. In the hard light of the Florida noon, he looked like a heroic statue of himself, cast in bronze for the world to admire. Carter smiled again. Only he would know how the boy had broken —and mended again—behind that same wall of mangroves. It was a secret he could well afford to keep. Sam Houston would have use for that pistol arm, in his dealings with the Mexican juntas.

Grady spoke as he puffed at the oars. "Well, Captain, did you enjoy your first duel?"

"Enormously, Sergeant."

"No one hurt, I see."

"No one. I told you I'd handle that."

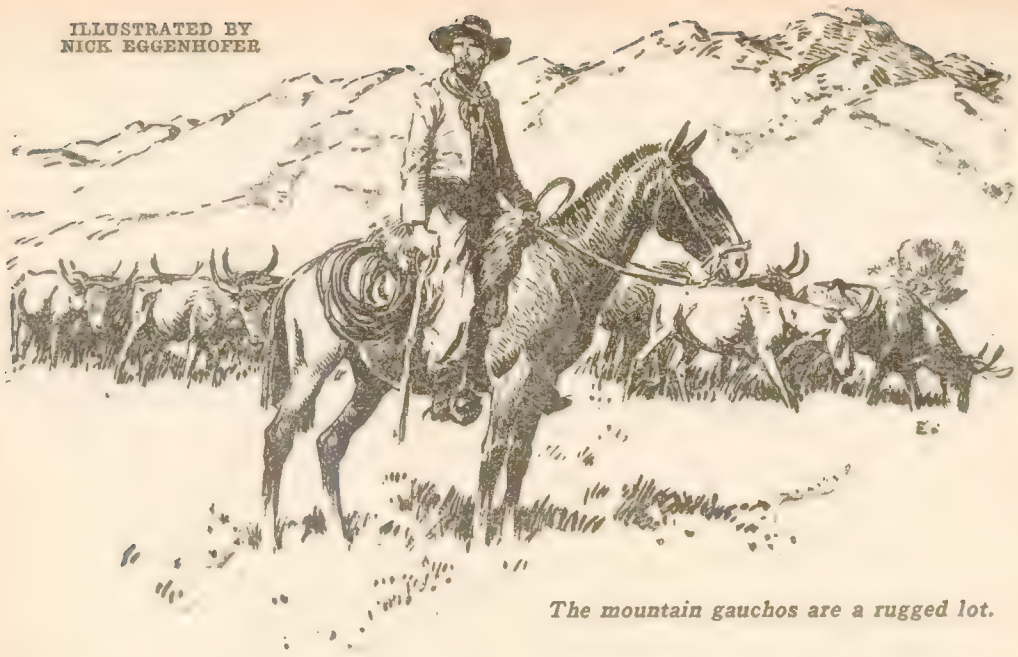
"Did his hammer miss fire, too, sir?"

Carter leaned forward sharply, as Grady grinned. "I warned you not to mix your sergeant in an affair of honor, sir—"

"Don't tell me you fouled those charges?"

"I did indeed. What's more, I rammed in two bread pellets instead of lead." The sergeant's grin was seraphic, now. "If you ask me, sir—which you won't—the Army can't afford to lose either of you."

ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK EGGENHOFER



The mountain gauchos are a rugged lot.

CATTLE in the CLOUDS

A Fact Story

By DAN L. THRAPP

PROBABLY there isn't a cowboy in the West who won't swear that a Texas steer can go three miles in the air. Straight up! But it would be difficult to demonstrate.

There are steers in Argentina, however, which do reach a point three miles high twice or three times a week.

In times gone by Texas riders have driven longhorns on some of the most fantastic marches in recorded history. During the seventies many a thousand head of cattle from the Rio Grande brush country were pushed as far north as Kansas, Montana, and even Canada. But despite the tremendous distances covered, rarely did the great trail riders of our West have to face the incredible hardships or accomplish such stupendous feats as do the gauchos of Argentina in their comparatively short cattle drives over the Andes to Chile.

Cattle from Salta, Argentina, are herded on the hoof literally three miles up, to cross the Andes at 16,000 feet—1,500 feet higher than the tallest mountain in continental United States. In ten days or two weeks, long-legged, long-horned *criollo* cattle, the South American blood-cousin of the Texas longhorn, climb and slide their weary way from Argentina to the mines of Antofagasta, Chile, where they become beefsteaks to help thousands of miners get out copper for our war industries.

Every few days, winter and summer, herds of seventy-five to a hundred head of *criollo* cattle leave Salta on the terrific march. They must be started out fat, in order to reach the other side at all. None arrives in what we would call good condition.

Six to eight gauchos, mounted on mules, make the drive and their supplies are packed on other mules or an occasional horse. The altitude is far too great for the average prairie bred horse and only the sturdy mountain mules can stand the work. The *remuda* is not large —mules are expensive, even in Argentina.

The mountain gauchos are a rugged lot, tougher than their pampa counterparts and less inclined toward "show." None of the fleecy, mattress-like saddles of the plains for these men! They have work to do, and the saddle they use is as efficient as our own. The tree looks something like a McClellan tree, but it is covered with finely carved leather

and the long lasso (always of rawhide and sometimes seventy-five feet or more in length) is fastened, of course, to an iron ring at the rear and on the right, so that a mule or horse when holding a roped steer faces away from it, instead of toward it, as does the roping horse in this country where the lariat is anchored at the saddle horn.

These moccasined riders wear the broad-brimmed hat typical of most horsemen the world over, and of course they also wear the baggy pants known as *bombachas,* but the mark of their trade and the key to their character is the tremendously long *cuchillo,* or knife, they wear at a rakish angle in the wide belt at the small of their back. The knife is to a gaucho what the .45 was to the cowboy.

The inevitable *cuchillo,* however, is more than a weapon. It is used to butcher the beef they eat on the trail over the mountains, and helps cut it into mouthfuls once it is butchered. It is used to cut leather and firewood, to impress the ladies or, on occasion, to stick one's enemies.

ALMOST as soon as the trail herd leaves Salta the climb over the Andes is begun, and within four days the Paso de Alto Chorillos, which at more than 16,000 feet is the highest point in the trail, is passed. For more than two hundred miles then, the herd must cross the Andean plateau, three miles above sea level and, for one arid stretch, sixty miles between waterholes. Here in the wintertime the temperature sometimes drops to thirty below and howling blizzards sometimes cause heavy loss in cattle and occasionally the loss of a rider. Even in the summertime the drive is no joke. The mountain plateau is little more than a desert and the savage white glitter of the gigantic *salinas,* or salt beds, and the roaring dust-laden winds, so hot they feel like a blast from a furnace, make travel all but an impossibility. Add to this the fact that at such tremendous altitude breathing itself is an effort —the slightest physical exertion leaves one gasping like a worn-out locomotive—and it's not hard to realize that these gauchos really have to be tough.

At length the little trail herds pass beneath the shadow of the 20,000 foot volcano Socompa, on the frontier between Chile and Argentina, and the descent begins. Here the going is scarcely easier, although it is downhill, for the country is more parched. This is the southern edge of the "driest desert in the world," where once it did not rain for twenty-nine recorded years. It is no wonder that what cattle survive the march arrive finally at Antofagasta in a weakened condition. The wonder is that they arrive at all.

Once their charges are delivered to the mine corrals, the riders, with scarcely a pause for *vino* or a sip of their ever-craved *mate,* turn about and speedily make the return over the mountains to Salta once again. From there they drop on down into the lush prairie lands of the Chaco, to gather another herd for the mountain crossing.

Soon now, within three or four years, the drive over the Andes will be a thing of the past. A railroad now being constructed by Argentina and Chile from Salta to Antofagasta will be completed within that time and the cattle of the Chaco, instead of hoofing it to Chile, will ride in the relative luxury of cattle cars. Meanwhile, the drive goes on.

YELLOW STRIPES FOR GLORY!

By Harry F. Olmsted

Damned by his saddle-mates for a coward and traitor, Jeff Caddock sought the dread secrets of the Devil's Funnel, where skeletons of forgotten monsters watched over the murdered body of a cavalry sergeant—and served as tombstones for any who dared to ask how he had died!

Harry Olmsted's thrilling novel, one of the most powerful he has ever written for STAR WESTERN, is one of six long, punch-packed stories of the old West in the current issue . . . stories by Walt Coburn, Fred Gipson, Norrell Gregory, William R. Cox and Tom Roan!

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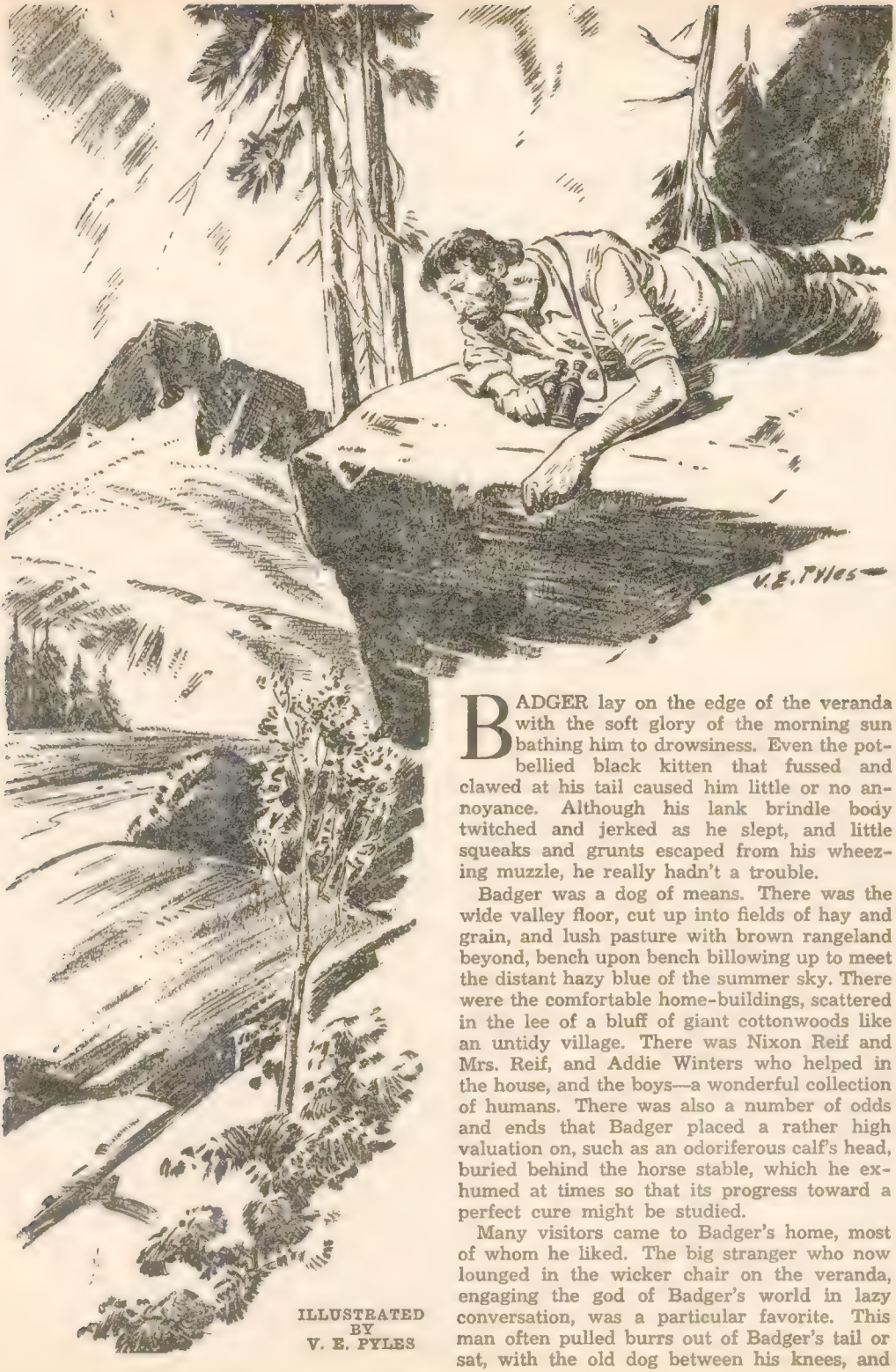
BADGER'S GOLD

By

GORDON CLEAL

Badger went into the air like a flying squirrel and landed in Deeson's face.



ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

BADGER lay on the edge of the veranda with the soft glory of the morning sun bathing him to drowsiness. Even the pot-bellied black kitten that fussed and clawed at his tail caused him little or no annoyance. Although his lank brindle body twitched and jerked as he slept, and little squeaks and grunts escaped from his wheezing muzzle, he really hadn't a trouble.

Badger was a dog of means. There was the wide valley floor, cut up into fields of hay and grain, and lush pasture with brown rangeland beyond, bench upon bench billowing up to meet the distant hazy blue of the summer sky. There were the comfortable home-buildings, scattered in the lee of a bluff of giant cottonwoods like an untidy village. There was Nixon Reif and Mrs. Reif, and Addie Winters who helped in the house, and the boys—a wonderful collection of humans. There was also a number of odds and ends that Badger placed a rather high valuation on, such as an odoriferous calf's head, buried behind the horse stable, which he exhumed at times so that its progress toward a perfect cure might be studied.

Many visitors came to Badger's home, most of whom he liked. The big stranger who now lounged in the wicker chair on the veranda, engaging the god of Badger's world in lazy conversation, was a particular favorite. This man often pulled burrs out of Badger's tail or sat, with the old dog between his knees, and

rubbed his ears gently. He was low-voiced and easy-going, like Nixon Reif, and although he carried all the strange scents of the city and had soft hands, he seemed as much at home out of doors as Nixon.

"Nix, look at that kitten tearing old Badger's tail to pieces, and him just lying there suffering in silence! I don't suppose that good-natured old lump ever snapped at anything or anybody in his life," the big man observed with a chuckle.

Nixon gazed at the old dog for a long moment, as though reviewing the past and weighing his answer. "I seen him bite once, Mart," he finally announced. "You'll notice his left eye is gone. That's when he lost it. He did more biting then, all in a few minutes, than most dogs do in a lifetime."

The big man got out cigars and a light while his host sat gazing solemnly across the valley. "How does she go, Nix?" he asked, with a show of interest.

Nixon was deliberate in getting his cigar going. "I ain't never told anyone," he answered through a cloud of fragrant smoke, "mostly because I'd have been put down for a liar. And then, the show left me in kind of an awkward hole, so I just kept it under my hat. That there gold nugget that's in on the mantel, was the cause of the whole thing.

"I was batching in those days, down in the old cabin near the creek. Had a little bunch of horses and used to take out hunting parties when the chance offered. One fall I took one of these here English fellers, away back east here into the hills, after grizzly." Nixon waved a languid hand toward a rugged range piled high against the sky, in the hazy distance. "Away back in there, in the bed of a little creek, I found that nugget. Didn't know it was gold but thought it might be, so I stuck it down in my jeans and said nothing about it.

"It was along in May, the following spring, that a middle-aged feller with a saddle horse and some camping gear drifted along. Badger was with him. That would be—let me see—sixteen years this past spring. That makes the old feller about eighteen—hard to believe, but that's what he is. Most dogs get to chewing their paws off with rheumatism, or crawl under the woodshed and die long before they get that old. Of course, he ain't no common dog by a long ways. He never eats more than he needs and he always gets around quite a bit and he never had any use for lying up to the fire. He's got a pretty good head on his shoulders, too. You noticed him chasing chickens out of the yard and pushing the gate shut, and putting the rollers under the pigs when they get over near the garden, and all the rest of his fussing around? Well, he just picked that up himself. Nobody ever told him to do it. He has a notion he owns this layout, lock, stock an' barrel, me and the rest of the folks included."

Nixon chuckled, tipped his chair back to a more comfortable angle, relit his cigar and continued.

"This here Tom Deeson was a pretty good sort of a jasper—good worker and all right to live with. He was sizable, with blue eyes and black hair, mouth kind o' thin and down at one corner, but kind of good looking anyway. Had a body that was made to order—steel and whipcord. But there was something edgy about him that you couldn't lay your finger on, something that kept a little bee buzzing around in the back of your head. He was one of those hill-billies that stay off in the hills by themselves most of the time. You know the breed, Mart."

MARTIN SHERIDAN nodded solemnly. "Sure, Nix, I know; usually they seem sensible and normal, but away down in the back of their heads there's something terribly wrong, something they're always foxy enough to cover up."

Reif nodded. "That's it, Mart. Something that pricks your back hair once in every so often, but as a rule, you're not conscious of it at all.

"Well, anyway, Tom Deeson hung out with me for quite a spell. Talked free enough about one thing and another but never said where he came from or where he figured on going. We did some fencing and this an' that and hunted some for meat. Badger walked on Tom's heels all the time just like he does with me now. Seemed to think a whale of a lot of him, but the queer thing was, Tom never took any notice of the dog—only when he wanted something done. He'd point his finger at the horses and say, 'Get 'em,' and Badger would fetch 'em up, not running and tearing but easy like, without getting 'em stirred up and excited. If Tom tied up a bronc in the corral, he'd say, 'Watch 'im,' and Badger would stay there and nip the bronc up whenever he strained at the rope. He'd stay there for an hour or a day, depending on when Deeson told him to cut it out.

"Funny thing is, the first thing I noticed about Badger then was the thing you mentioned. He was sure good-natured. The cat always helped him eat—you know how most dogs hate that. And any time a quarrelsome dog came around, Badger just got out of the way. He just didn't seem able to stick up his hair and growl. But you should have seen his teeth, then. Only yellow stubs left now, but at that time they were a double row of white butcher knives. Made your hair stick up to look at them.

"As I was saying, what opened the main event was that there gold nugget. Deeson ran onto it in a box I kept sewing things and buttons in, and before I knew what I was doing, I admitted that I had picked it up. I'd had a

notion Tom was one of these here wandering prospector nuts but he darn soon put me right. He knew mining and prospecting and geology and the history of creation upside down an' crossways. I didn't know anything at all about such things. I knew that geology was the study of rocks or something like that, but I'd never paid much attention to any of that professor stuff. Anyway, I had common sense enough to know that Tom Deeson wasn't talking through his hat.

"We talked back and forth all evening and before we went to bed had a fifty-fifty deal all settled. I knew where I'd picked up the nugget and I had a grubstake and outfit and Tom knew the rest. It may look like I was putting in more than he was, but then you got to remember that there's a whale of a lot more to taking out gold than picking up a grain of it in a creek bed.

"Well, we got an outfit together and got started, and everything went smooth as oil until one evening when we were about a week out. Tom had put a plate down with a couple of flap-jacks on it. After a while, when we were straightening things up, he asked me if I had taken 'em and I said I hadn't. Tom nodded, cool as ice, and went over to his saddle and picked up his quirt. It was a heavy one. Then he got Badger by the neck and commenced to lick him. You know what a good quirt will do to a horse, Mart. Well, every cut Deeson made at that dog was the best he could do. Badger crouched down on the ground and howled—never made any attempt to fight back, just howled and yelled. What Deeson was doing to him would have made a log of wood howl.

"I went off up the trail till it was all over and, judging by the way the howls petered out, Deeson pounded the poor devil until he passed out. For a couple of days he was the most hellish sight you ever saw in your life. Deeson never mentioned the incident. When I got back to camp he was as cool and collected as if he'd been brushing crumbs off his clothes."

"Why didn't you plug a bullet into him?" Sheridan grated.

Nixon Reif threw away his cigar and fumbled for his pipe.

"Mart," he answered after a long pause, "I guess I was afraid. I've never been afraid of anybody or anything before or since, but I was afraid of Tom Deeson. When I looked into those queer blue eyes of his, I knew that he knew just how I felt about the dog-beating business, and I knew that he knew he had the bulge on me—and sure enough, he did.

"We were both wearing guns. I had a .38 Colt and he had a .45 Frontier pattern. You know, Mart, the way a gun bothers a man who ain't used to wearing one. Well, this here Deeson didn't notice his any more than if it was a horsefly stickin' to the leg of his overalls. And then, a couple of days later, I saw him use it. I made up my mind right then that, as far as Tom Deeson was concerned, I might as well throw mine away.

"It was this way. I was riding along a trail through jackpine with Tom coming along behind—somehow he always managed to get behind me. We had a rifle in one of the packs and I was just figuring I ought to carry it, on the chance of getting some meat, when a yearling buck stepped into an open space about thirty yards to the south. Thinking of a chance shot, I grabbed for my gun, but before I touched the butt that buck was dead. It was quicker than thought. Deeson had hit him right in the curl of the forehead. Tom sort of apologized for grabbing the shot, but he said he thought I'd shoot high. Well, sir, you could have knocked me down with a straw. He had never seen me shoot with the .38 that I knew of. You know, Mart, I always did shoot high with a small gun, but how did Deeson know? I just blurted out and asked him and he said something about putting two and two together, and went to skin the buck.

"Don't get the idea that Tom Deeson was mean to live with, for he wasn't. He was always pleasant and held up his end of the work. Bad weather never bothered him any and he was the most entertaining man a feller ever went into the hills with. But one thing I knew right well by that time was that he wouldn't bother any more over killing a man than he would over tramping on a beetle.

"Deeson had my goat all right, but he didn't seem to have Badger's. After the beating, the dog went along about his business same as before, trotting around on Tom's heels and lying down beside him when we were in camp. Only difference I noticed was that he took to shoving his nose into my hand now and then, when Tom wasn't around.

"We spent quite a bit of time locating my valley. There had been a couple of bad burns since I was in before and the going was rotten. We located the gold after a lot of digging and prowling around. It didn't amount to any big killing but enough to set a man up pretty well. I was kind of disappointed, but Tom seemed satisfied. He rigged up a haywire contraption that we worked the dirt through and we fair killed ourselves. I've sure hated the sight of a shovel ever since! Our clothes went to pieces and my whiskers prospered until I looked like a lost horse-thief.

"WE HAD our horses running up at the far end of the valley, where they couldn't get out, and it was Badger's job to keep them there—some job after they got it fed off a little. Kept him on the jump most of the time.

"Somehow or other, meat was scarce around there and we couldn't spare much time to go after it, so we had to be pretty mean with the

grub. It used to tear the heart out of me, the way Badger would sit up solemn like, with strings of spit hanging from his jaws, watching us eat. Tom let me know from the start-off that *he* was looking after the dog, and say, what he gave that poor dog to eat wouldn't keep a gopher alive! I took to slipping him a bite now and then, when Tom wasn't looking, and that dog was as slick as can be at getting it. He seemed to realize that we were skating on thin ice. He must have picked up a sidehill gouger or a foolhen or something now and then because, in spite of looking pretty lean, he kept well and strong.

"Time went on until we decided we had all the gold we were going to get. Tom Deeson was in high spirits and so was I. The whole works had got on my nerves so that I was crazy to leave that neck of the woods, gold or no gold.

"We were camped on a little open bench above the creek, with a rocky ravine, filled with brush and trees, running down beside it. All I got to do is to close my eyes and I can see the whole works now, right down to the last twig and empty tin.

"It was along about noon of the day before we figured on pulling out that Tom noticed a small black bear on the rocky ridge across the valley. We were short of meat and anxious to kill something. He was cleaning the rifle at the time. I thought I could see the bear behind a big boulder but wasn't sure, so I got my old field-glasses and stepped out to have a good look. Just as I slipped the strap over my head, I heard the rifle click.

"I didn't think, didn't have time to think. It was a hunch that moved me, and the hunch was good. *Bang!* goes the rifle an' something slapped my left arm below the elbow. *Bang!* again and my left ear felt funny. As I floundered into the ravine, bullets whipped and zipped through the trees in every direction. I sure made record time getting down that ravine to the creek bottom! I had a picture in the back of my head of Deeson slipping along behind me, chewing a straw and squinting through the trees, with those navy-blue eyes of his, for the next pot-shot.

"The valley was partly wooded and partly open. The trees were mostly small and not very close together but there was lots of brush along the creek, so it wasn't hard to keep out of sight.

"I worked my way down the valley as fast as I could, feeling hopeless and done for. There was no way of getting out without going about five miles south, where there was a low place on the opposite side. My ear and arm were bleeding something desperate. I couldn't do anything for the ear, but I tore the sleeve out of my shirt and got my arm stopped as I went along. The arm wasn't broken but it sure was a mess. If I'd had a gun, I'd have turned around an' had it out with Deeson, but I didn't even have a jack-knife.

"I hadn't gone far when I noticed Badger slipping along behind. It sure gave me a scare, because I thought Tom would be with him, but he wasn't. Badger had thrown in on what looked like the losing side.

"After I'd gone about a mile, the gun banged as I was crossing an open spot and I heard the bullet go over my head. That set me thinking. Tom was keeping up a ways and working down the valley, figuring I would try to go out the way we came in. There was a chance that if I could get up over the rocky ridge on the opposite side, I could give him the slip. Of course, I knew I'd be up against it for grub but that wasn't worrying me just then. What I wanted to do was to get out of range of that doggone rifle.

"My chance came before long. There was a deep ravine filled with brush and trees cutting through the ridge, so I slipped into it and worked my way up. Badger was right on my heels, poking his nose into my hand when I stopped for a breather. You ain't got any idea what a comfort it was having him with me.

"My arm was getting sore and I was just about knocked out when I got up to where the draw played out. From below it had looked pretty rough, but up there it was fierce. Some of the going was straight up and down and I had to work back north to find a spot I could climb. After I had gone quite a distance I sat down beside a big boulder, and Badger lay down beside me. He began to look back and whine. The glasses were still hanging on my neck so I screwed them up and took a good look up and down the valley. The last place I looked, I spotted Deeson. He was about halfway up the ravine, standing on a boulder, looking uphill. That just about finished me. I knew he was trailing me, and doing a perfect job.

"When Tom went back into the ravine, I got up and traveled like the devil was on my heels. The dog was scrambling along behind, whining and fussing all the time. I went along ledges and up rock-slides, falling and stumbling. Some places I got up, Badger had a hard time to follow. Then I worked into a lot of straight-up stuff that he couldn't make at all. I climbed off a narrow ledge, up a crack, to a ledge the size of a small room. There was no way out, so I lay down and waited for the end. I was so doggone done in, I didn't seem to care what happened to me.

"Badger stood up on his hind legs in the crack, and fussed and whined. He couldn't get up and I couldn't reach him to pull him up. I didn't want him on the ledge with me, anyway, because I knew Tom would plug him for throwing in with me. There was a chance that Tom hadn't noticed him and thought he had stayed in camp, so I decided to send him back. On

that rocky hillside, his brindle color blended with the boulders and rubbish, so I figured it was a fair gamble that he'd get back to camp without being noticed. When I pointed toward the valley and told him to go back down there, he seemed to get the idea. First, he looked down the ridge for a minute or so, and then turned around and stood up against the rock and whimpered. His eyes were as soft as velvet and it seemed like there were tears in them. I thought he was saying good-by and it choked me up. He stood like that for a while and then moved out to where he could see down the ridge again.

"I COULDN'T see Deeson down there and I don't suppose Badger could either, but he must have got a scent on the breeze that was coming up from below. He began to tighten up and stiffen on his legs and change from a common dog, like you see around barnyards, to what his ancestors were before they learned to walk at a man's heels. His ears went tight to his skull, and the sight of those white daggers of teeth made the hide crawl around on my back. He's a pretty big dog anyway, but with the hair on his neck and back standing up stiff and straight, he looked as big as a cougar and as dangerous as dynamite. He didn't growl, but his silence seemed ominous and loaded with purpose. When he moved off downhill, slipping from rock to rock, he was like a shadow cast by a soaring hawk.

"I lay face-down on the ledge, feeling mighty lonesome but glad that Badger had a chance to get away. My arm was sore, but not what you might think. When a man gets as badly used up as I was, he feels sort of numb and loses interest in his miseries.

"The strap of my field-glasses pulling on my neck sort of revived my interest in the show, so I screwed them up and took a look around. Deeson wasn't in sight but I located Badger right away. There was a flat-topped rock, about the size of a wood-shed, that I remembered passing on the way up. He was lying on the top of that, so flat and still that he looked like a doormat. The sight of him cheered me almost as much as if I were getting away from there myself. I figgered he'd lie there until Tom went by and then slip back to camp. I didn't gloat over that notion very long, for something happened that changed the picture altogether. He began to creep toward the front edge of the rock.

"For a moment I was puzzled and then an idea of what was going on down there hit me like a blow in the face. I hadn't realized that when Badger threw in with me, the change was permanent. He wasn't Tom Deeson's dog any longer. He was mine or, probably the way he looked at it, I was his man. More than that, I was his friend. People toss friendship around pretty reckless, but to a dog, friendship is something to live and die for. When I sent Badger down the ridge, he figgered I was sending him down there to stop Tom Deeson and he knew, as well as I did, that the only way to stop Tom was to kill him. So there he was, flattened out on the edge of that rock, digging in his toes and waiting. He had courage and love and a set of awful teeth, but that didn't seem to me to be enough. Deeson had weight and the fighting courage of a wolverine, and on top of that, he had a rifle.

"I forgot my sore arm and my misery and lay there, with the glasses glued to my eyes, doing my best to breathe and waiting for Deeson to show up. When he showed up, he was up on his toes and looking at the ground. You or I would have seen nothing to follow on that hillside, but a moved pebble here and there was enough for him.

"It must have been the scratch of the dog's claws on the rock that warned him and brought him around quicker than a flash of light. He took a snap shot without getting the gun to his shoulder, but it wasn't his lucky day.

"Badger went out into the air like a flying squirrel and landed in Deeson's face, and they both went down together. Tom lost his gun and they rolled over and over, first one on top and then the other. I was so excited I dropped my glasses and when I got them up again, Tom was on his feet. He kicked the dog right over on his back and made a lunge for the gun, but Badger jumped him before he could pick

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it up and down they went again. Tom tried to get a stone but it was no go because he had to use both hands to keep those slashing teeth away from his throat. He finally managed to get Badger by the neck and turn him over on his back. For twenty long seconds it looked like Deeson's fight. He flattened the dog on the ground and got his knees on him, but Badger wriggled around and fastened on an arm and Tom had to let go and jump up.

"That was the end of Round One. They rested four feet apart. Deeson knew better than to try to get away. He knew that if ever he got away from there, he'd have to leave a dead dog behind. His shirt was gone and one leg of his pants, and his shoulders and arms were horrible. He crouched forward, fighting for breath and waiting for the show to start again. Up to then, fear hadn't laid a hand on him. His face was a devil's mask.

"Badger sat on his haunches with his mouth open and his tongue out. He was puffing like a steam engine. Maybe he knew he was between Deeson and the gun. I believe he did. One thing he sure did know, was that he stood between Deeson and me. I gave thanks to God for that. I was afraid he was sitting down because his hind legs were hurt but I didn't have to worry over that very long. Deeson started to edge toward him, and he stood up and set himself like a tight spring. He snapped his mouth shut and his lips came up off his teeth. So did Deeson's.

"I didn't see Round Two begin because I had to lower the glasses to rub my eyes. When I looked again, they were at it fast and furious, both of 'em taking awful punishment. Deeson was kicking, pounding and choking, and Badger was ripping and tearing. He undressed Tom in no time and tore him to pieces in the process, until he had him staggering and done in. Then he flew in and caught Deeson in the stomach and yanked him to his knees.

"Fear had its way with Tom Deeson then. It opened his mouth and he screamed. I could hear him away up there where I was. Lots of men can stand pain and die quietly, but mutilation turns any man's blood to water.

"Deeson never got up again. They went at it on the ground for a spell, and then Badger got Tom by the throat and pushed him over backwards. I jumped up and yelled, 'No! no! no!' and started scrambling down off the ledge."

Nixon Reif knocked the ashes out of his pipe and laid it on the veranda railing. "I didn't see the finish, Mart," he muttered, "and I've always been glad I didn't. When I got pretty near down to where they were, I met Badger coming back, wobbling from side to side and staggering around. His eye was gone and his ear shot to pieces, and he was so badly mauled that I didn't believe he would live. He wagged his tail a little and looked back down the hill and gave a weak little bark.

"I ain't going to tell you what I found when I got down there to Tom Deeson. I've spent years trying to forget it."

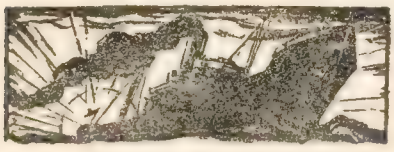
"And the gold?" Sheridan asked.

Reif waved an arm out toward the broad valley and smiled. "It's all here. I put it into buildings, land, stock and odds and ends. I figger Badger has always approved of the investment."

A hen came into the yard and commenced scratching under a lilac bush. The old dog got up and stretched lazily, then went down and sent her screaming over the fence. He slouched over to the gate and gave it a noisy slam, then went back to the veranda and flopped down with a thud right at Nixon Reif's feet.

AMERICAN SHIPS

By BERTON BRALEY

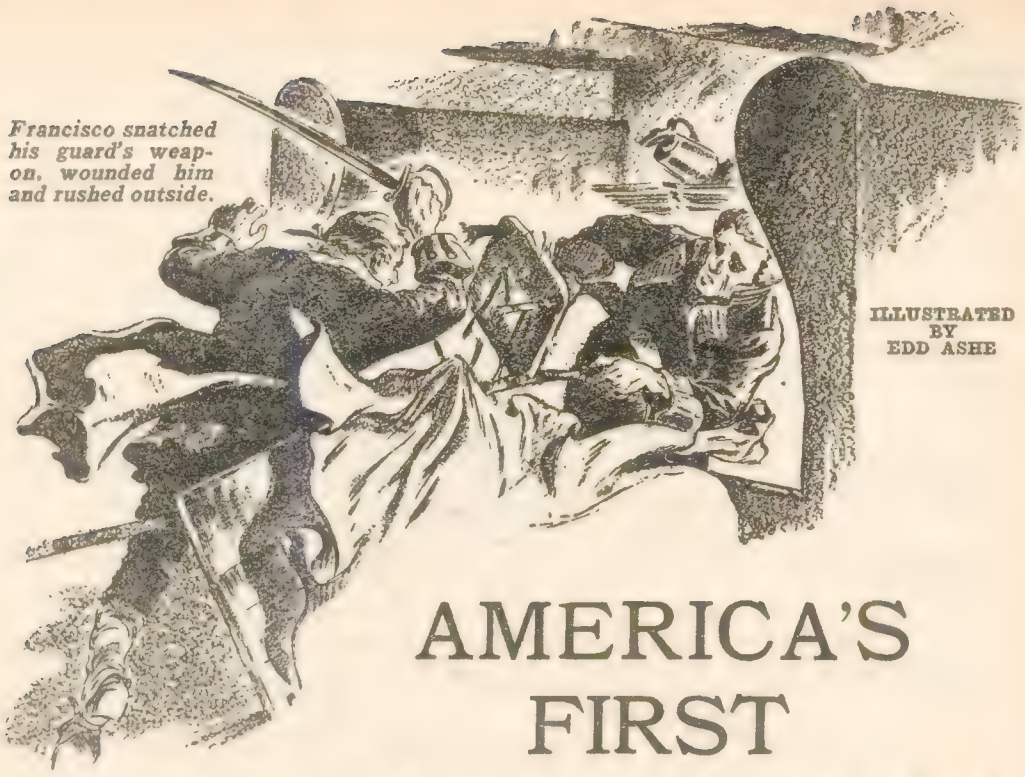


American Ships—we have kept 'em sailing
When seas were fetid with dragons' breath,
When waves were seething and skies were hailing
With slinking murder and plunging death.
We kept 'em sailing through wreck-strewn seaways
When menace lurked in each mile they plowed,
So, when the waters once more are free ways
We'll keep 'em sailing, far, swift and proud.

We kept 'em sailing to fronts far-scattered
On every tide and to every shore,
And ships were blasted, and burnt and shattered
But others followed—and more, and more!
American Ships—we have kept 'em sailing
Through lethal darkness and deadly dawn,
And when peace comes, we shall not be failing,
We'll keep 'em sailing and sailing on.

By the welds we've welded, the sweat we've sweated,
By the miracles brain and brawn have made,
By the chances chanced where the seas were fretted
With hate and terror, we've learned our trade.
From the Saipan beach to the cliffs of Dover
We have met the test and we've met it fair,
And when the missions of war are over
We'll keep 'em sailing to—everywhere.

American Ships—we have kept 'em sailing
Whenever the lightnings of war were hurled,
And we'll sail 'em still, with the old flag flailing
In all the winds of the peacetime world!



Francisco snatched his guard's weapon, wounded him and rushed outside.

ILLUSTRATED BY EDD ASHE

AMERICA'S FIRST ONE-MAN ARMY

A Fact Story

By JOHN RICHARD YOUNG

SOME of the feats performed by American fighting-men in World War II indicate almost incredible valor and daring. The examples of such men as Captain Arthur Werner and Sergeant 'Commando' Kelly leave us pretty safe in claiming that the American soldier is a fighter second to none. But how many of us know that men like Kelly and Werner are only following the example set by another American soldier famed as "the One-Man Army" of his day—a young giant named Peter Francisco who was without doubt one of the greatest fighting-men, and one of the strongest men, who ever lived.

Peter Francisco never heard of a machine gun or a dive-bomber, but he would have fitted perfectly into any company of American Rangers or Marine Raiders. He had brains as well as brawn. Indeed, so effective was he in action that he remains to this day the only soldier in the history of the American Army to whom his superiors gave official permission to fight as, when and where he pleased, "independent to think and act however best he might cripple the enemy."

This paragon of warriors was born in 1759 or '60, of a noble family in Spain. During a fiesta when he was five or six years old, he was kidnaped by a sailor and brought to City Point on the James River in Virginia in America. The motive for the kidnaping remains a mystery, but Spanish court records verify the crime.

In Virginia young Francisco grew up as the adopted son of Judge Anthony Winston, uncle of the famous patriot, Patrick Henry.

In 1777, when the American Revolution was in its second year, Peter Francisco was sixteen years old, stood six-feet-six in his socks and weighed 260 pounds. Though only a boy in years, he was already of such Herculean strength that he was permitted to enlist in the Tenth Virginia Regiment. Almost immediately he began to distinguish himself.

At the battle of Stony Point he received a nine-inch gash in the abdomen, yet was the first soldier after Major Gibbons to scale the walls. At Powell's Hook, though bayoneted through one thigh, he cut down two enemy grenadiers.

He was with General Gates' brigade in the Carolinas when, during the battle of Camden, the artillery horses were shot. Francisco lifted an 1100-pound cannon and carried it two hundred yards to a new position.

In the same battle he saved his colonel from being sabered by an enemy dragoon. For this feat the officer willed the young giant ten thousand acres of land in Kentucky. Francisco, however, refused the gift.

General George Washington, commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, presented Francisco with a specially forged broadsword that had a blade five feet long and was so heavy that an ordinary man could not swing it with one hand.

With this sword (now in the possession of the Historical Society of Virginia) Francisco, though badly wounded himself, slew eleven grenadiers at the battle of Guilford Courthouse in March, 1778. A granite monument at Greensboro, North Carolina, now marks the spot where the eighteen-year-old lad performed this feat before many witnesses.

For his valor and superhuman prowess Francisco was offered a commission. He refused it on the grounds that he lacked the education an officer should have.

IN INDEPENDENCE HALL today hangs an engraving commemorating Francisco's encounter with nine enemy dragoons.

Two cavalry regiments under Tarleton and Cornwallis were ravaging the Virginia countryside. Francisco set out alone, determined either to stop their advance or harry their progress as much as he could.

While he was resting at a tavern in Amelia County, nine of Tarleton's dragoons took him prisoner. They made the mistake, however, of leaving him in the charge of only one man. Francisco snatched his guard's sword, wounded him, rushed outside roaring, "Come on, my brave lads! Now's your time!" and disarmed one of the mounted dragoons.

The other cavalrymen, deceived by Francisco's cries, fled back to Tarleton with the report that a superior American force was waiting for them ahead. Tarleton ordered a retreat. Thus did Peter Francisco earn the honor of being the only man in history single-handed to put to flight two whole regiments of cavalry.

To Henry Clay, a friend of the fighting Colossus, we are indebted for the following:

A renowned rough-and-tumble fighter of Kentucky traveled to Francisco's home in Virginia with the avowed purpose of whipping the Hercules of whose prowess he had heard so many tales. He simply did not believe that Francisco could be the fabulous superman folk said he was. Francisco, however, refused to fight over nothing. To prove his good nature, he pitched the Kentucky terror over a four-foot fence, lifted the fellow's horse over after him, and advised him to go home and forget about fighting.

Once, meeting a farmer with a six-horse team and a wagonload of tobacco bogged down in a mudhole, Francisco lifted the wagon to solid ground.

The great Richmond fire of 1811 started in a theater where Francisco was watching a play. A Mrs. Nelson, one of the persons he rescued, reported: "He returned again and again to the burning building and brought out more than thirty people in his strong arms."

Of the strength of those mighty arms Mrs. Murat Willis, wife of a nephew of Napoleon, leaves us no doubt. She wrote of a visit to Francisco's home: "One of my host's daily pleasures was to carry me on the palm of one hand and my sister on the palm of the other, at arm's-length, about the yard."

Peter Francisco died on January 16, 1831, at the age of seventy. He was buried with full military and Masonic honors. The governor, the entire senate and the house of representatives of Virginia, and the city council of Richmond attended his funeral. His grave is in Shockee Cemetery in Richmond.

He set the precedent for America's "one-man armies," and American fighting-men have lived up gloriously to his example.

ROGER SUDDEN

By THOMAS H. RADDALL

The foremost squaw, her face hideous with charcoal, uttered a long, high-pitched cry. Then the other women drew back, staring.

THE STORY THUS FAR:

ROGER SUDDEN, handsome young Jacobite, returns from the Continent to his family seat, Suddenholt, in Kent, on the night of January thirtieth, 1749, when the local Jacobite club is meeting there. He left Oxford to follow Prince Charlie into exile in '45 and is now returning to England to rally Jacobite support for him. He finds the estate in sad repair and his older brother, CHARLES, who inherited his father's taste for and debts from drinking, living off money borrowed from his feeble-minded AUNT PENNY. Charles gives him a cold welcome and assures him that none of the Jacobites in England will risk their lives for Prince Charlie. Disgusted and disillusioned, Roger leaves Suddenholt, promising his Aunt Penny that he will go to the colonies and bring back enough money to restore Suddenholt to its former glory.

ILLUSTRATED
BY
HARVE STEIN

On the road to London, penniless and undecided as to his destination, he is held up by TOM FULLER, a sailor turned highwayman. Managing to disarm the would-be holdup man, he decides to help him rob the Gravesend tide-coach to get some money. The sole occupants of the coach turn out to be two foppish British officers, COLONEL BELCHER and MAJOR WOLFE, who had fought Prince Charlie's men at Culloden. Delighted to find his victims are also his political enemies, Roger taunts them as he robs them, letting them know that he is a Jacobite but not revealing his name.

Reaching London, Tom Fuller guides Roger to Tooley Street in the Southwark slums, where they decide to hide out until they can find a boat leaving for one of the colonies—which one, Roger hasn't yet decided, but Tom has persuaded him to take him along wherever he goes.

They find accommodations in the house of ISAAC TROPE and his housekeeper, LUMLEY, and get to know the other inhabitants: SALLY MADIGAN, the pretty prostitute whose former room they occupy, and whose advances Roger repulses; BOB, the hackney-coachman, and his family; NED and JACK, the chairmen; LITTLE BOB, the pickpocket; MAGGS, the chimney-sweep, and his family; VACE, the journeyman-barber; KILLICK, the boatman, and his wife, an oysterwoman.

Roger's and Tom's decision to leave Tooley Street and their choice of destination is made for them when Tom is nearly apprehended as one of the tide-coach highwaymen. This misfortune coincides with the announcement of the Lord Mayor of London that the government will provide free passage for all discharged servicemen, husbandmen and those who know a trade,

to Nova Scotia and give land grants to them.

On the appointed day they sign up along with the impoverished denizens of Tooley Street and thousands like them from all over England. Roger and Tom are assigned to the *Fair Lady*, a snow, or small brig, whose captain is old JOB HUXLEY, who has been assigned to carry supplies for the new captain-general of the colony, COLONEL CORNWALLIS. On board they meet the only two paying passengers, CAPTAIN JOHN FOY and his wife, MARY FOY. Foy explains to Roger that the real purpose of this expedition is to build an English fort at Halifax strong enough to attack the French at Louisburg, the fort once captured by the British and recently returned when peace was signed. Roger is shocked by Mrs. Foy's unfeminine interest in the colonial struggle, and surprised when she rebuffs his hitherto irresistible attempts at love-making.

The *Fair Lady* reaches Chebucto harbor in Nova Scotia in June, preceded by Cornwallis' ship, the *Sphinx*, and one by one, the transports arrive. COLONEL MASCARENE and his council come from Annapolis to start a government, Warburton's Regiment is brought from Louisburg, and gradually a town begins to grow on the edge of the wilderness. Cornwallis orders the colonists to form groups and choose leaders, and to Roger's dismay, his friends from Tooley Street choose him. The clearing grows, huts are built, and INIGO BRUCE, the military surveyor, maps out the tiny town, which is named Halifax after the head of the Board of Trade and Plantations in Whitehall. Finally, lots are drawn, and to the settlers indignation, the town is only big enough for them to have tiny plots within its rough palisades; the rest of their land must be chosen out in the wilds.

Roger, bored and discouraged, drinks heavily and runs through his and Tom's "fortune," giving his last sixpence to Sally Madigan, who accosts him one night on his way home from a sutler's den.

CAPTAIN GORHAM, leader of the rangers who are assigned to protect the colonists, invites Roger to join his band, but he declines. However, he does agree to take his group from Tooley Street across the bay to work for Gorham's man, GILMAN, on a sawmill Cornwallis has ordered built. Gilman, Roger finds, is a shrewd fellow who is idling on the job so that Cornwallis will become discouraged with the mill's progress and sell it to Gilman for a song. Roger and the cockneys live in idleness with Gorham's rangers as fall approaches and the storms begin to lash Halifax.

One September day, a roving band of Micmac Indians falls upon the men at the mill site, beheads Vace and Jack and scalps Ned and Maggs. The rangers pursue them, but only manage to kill three before the rest escape in canoes. The rangers behead two of these in retaliation and scalp a third, who wears a small stone fish on a thong around his neck. They throw the scalped body into the lake and return to the mill site. Roger, who is carrying a decorated tomahawk he has picked up, stays behind, hoping to retrieve the heads of his friends. While looking through the underbrush to see if the Indians may have dropped their trophies while fleeing, he discovers a hidden canoe. Suddenly three Micmacs jump on him from behind, bind and gag him, and take him away, nearly unconscious, in their canoe.

PART III

THERE was a portage not far from the first lake—or was it the second, or third? He was only half-conscious. But the portage was clear enough, for he was slung out of the canoe there like a sack of meal, the thong was removed from his ankles, and one of the savages beat him unmercifully with a stick because he could not walk. His feet were numb and swollen and he fell on his face. They wrenched off his shoes and threw them away and dragged him to his feet again. Again he fell. Again the stick. His body was one big pain now and his nerves accepted the new burden dully. There was some debate among them. From their gestures, one was for killing the captive then and there. The others did not agree.

Finally he was slung over a brown shoulder and carried along a faint path in the shadow of big trees. Then sunlight and lapping water. Another lake. Another voyage on the canoe bottom with the hard brown buttocks on his chest. Again the hard-fought breathing, hissing past the wooden bit in his jaws. Again the darkness for a time. Then the canoe grated softly and the weight sprang off his breast. He was hoisted out and placed on his feet. With the thong gone the life had come back to them. He swayed a little. They were at the tip of a narrow lake that seemed to stretch on for several miles. The sun sat on a pine ridge to Roger's left. In a few moments it was gone and there was twilight. A path disappeared into the bushes a little way up the bank. There was a chill in the air and he shivered.

Soon he shivered much more for, after concealing the canoe and paddles in the woods, the savages stripped him to the skin. One put on the tattered breeches, another the shirt. They grinned at each other, the first sign of pleasure he had seen in them. The third, having no share in this poor loot, contented himself with cutting a stiff maple switch. They arranged themselves in a little procession in the path; first he of the breeches, then the captive, then he of the switch, and finally he of the shirt. The switch came down with a terrific cut across Roger's back and he leaped into movement like a stung horse. This was desired, apparently, for they all broke into a trot up the path, the savages lift-

The canoe grated softly at the tip of a narrow lake.

ing their voices in long cracked howls. There were answering howls in the woods ahead and after fifty yards or so their small procession came into an open space where several fires were burning and a rabble of painted Indians came running and squalling toward them, catching up sticks of firewood as they ran. There were twenty or thirty of them, all young and active males. In a moment the prisoner was surrounded by a whooping swarm all trying to strike at once. He fell to his knees under the sheer weight of this wooden torrent and thought dimly, *It is all over, this is the end.*

A voice cut through the wild chorus. The rain of sticks died away in a patter which he scarcely felt, and one last vicious cut of the maple switch that he did. The crowd opened a little. Roger was still on his knees, bowed against the storm. He tried to stop the trembling which shook his beaten flesh, and failed. But he managed to lift his head. He was aware of an awful necessity for courage, or a show of it at any rate, an insistent something, sheer Kentish stubbornness perhaps, arising from some unbeaten part of him inside.

His captors seemed to be telling their tale, a gabble of three voices going on and on. The tomahawk was displayed and passed from hand to hand.

A strange voice said sharply, "Stand up!" in English.

Roger rose unsteadily and perceived a small man, brown and gleaming like the others, in clout and moccasins and with a hawk feather thrust in his topknot. A necklace of bear claws hung about his neck with a tobacco pipe of polished gray stone slung by a slender thong. His black beard marked him for a European, or a half-blood more likely. The beard had been trimmed carelessly, probably with a sharp knife. A pelt of curly black hair grew on his lean breast and down his belly, and his thin corded arms were as hairy as a bear's. He displayed the brass tomahawk.

"Where you get dees?"

"I picked it up."

"'Ow you get dees?"

"It was thrown at me and I picked it up."

"Th'own? What mean th'own?"

Roger repeated his words in French. The man's small brown eyes gleamed. In the Acadian dialect he spat out rapidly, *"Tiens!* What is this that you speak French? You are English, you!"

"I have lived in France."

"Are you one of Gorham's men?"

"No."

"You *are* one of Gorham's men. What did you do to Peyal?"

"I do not know Peyal."

A flourish of the brass tomahawk. "This was Peyal's. You are one of Gorham's men and you killed Peyal and took his head."

"I killed no one. I am a woodcutter. I found the hatchet by the shore of Chebucto where your people killed my friends."

The fellow uttered a few gutturals over his shoulder and two of the savages fetched a pole with two heads dangling from it. Darkness was falling fast, but in the flicker of the fires Roger recognized the waxy faces of Vace and Jack, eyes closed, mouths agape, expressionless as masks.

"Are these your friends?"

"Yes."

"Eh bien"—maliciously—"you have found them. What did they at Chebucto?"

"They wished to live there, I suppose."

"How many redcoats at Chebucto?"

"Two regiments."

"How many?"

"I do not know."

"Fool! You must tell me or *these* will roast you in the fire."

GAUTIER

"The fire cannot tell me what I do not know."

"You are one of Gorham's men!"

"I am a woodcutter."

"Where is Peyal?"

"I do not know."

So it went on, for a long time, and the savages grew restive. Several shook their hatchets in the prisoner's face. At last the Acadian wearied of this circular catechism. Roger's hands were fastened behind his back again, and his feet hobbled with a thong. The savages returned to their meals at the fires. After a time they slept. There was dew on the grass and it chilled Roger's naked flesh to the bone. Even the stars were cold. His feet were at ease in the hobble but the tight thong about his wrists called up once more the throbbing agony of the journey from Chebucto.

In the morning a mist hung like a cold fleece on the still surface of the lake. He was put in a canoe. The Acadian sat in the stern, a savage in the bow. When the sun broke through the vapor in the forenoon he saw that they were moving toward the north or northeast. On all sides he could hear paddles and occasional talk from the other canoes of the war party. After about four miles the forest came together and there was a river, shallow after the summer drought, but growing in volume as the miles went past. A chill wind worried the tree-tops but inside the canoe where the sun fell there was shelter and warmth and he was grateful. The river widened steadily and after a time there were red clay banks. Toward sunset they came to a place where there was a grassy slope above the river, with paths trodden bare in the red earth. Roger was lifted out of the canoe. The hobble was cut away from his ankles.

He saw a village of bark huts, some of them square and not unlike the shanties at Halifax; most of them cone-shaped—evidently the "wigwams" of the rangers' tales—and at least two buildings of logs stood on end with red clay plastered in the chinks and covered with a roof of bark. The village was overhung with a blue mist of wood smoke and it sprawled over the slope in a clearing so old that the last trace of stumps and roots had gone.

The war party set up that painfully familiar squalling and the village gave tongue in reply. A swarm of men in leather clouts, women in greasy buckskin smocks and children as naked as the wind came howling down to the bank, catching up sticks as they ran, accompanied by a rabble of dogs.

Roger's personal captors formed their little procession for the triumph, a stick lashed his bruised skin cruelly and he broke into an obedient run toward the huts. In a moment he was surrounded by a mad mob, shrieking, clawing for a chance to strike at him, a whole forest of sticks rising and falling, even the gaunt wolf-dogs burrowing under the tumult to snap at his ankles. He went down under it and lay amongst the snarling dogs. There was a momentary respite while the dogs were beaten off. He was jerked to his feet and again the howl went up, again the sticks rose and fell. He was barely conscious of them now. The uproar came and went in waves like a mirage of sound. He was aware of a fatuous smile upon his lips.

CHAPTER XII

SHUBENACADIE

DARKNESS. Not the whole darkness of night nor the cool gloom of the forest. A brown darkness, warm somehow. A mingled smell of wood smoke and stale tobacco and food and of unwashed human flesh. He opened his eyes and saw that he was lying in a wigwam made of broad sheets of birchbark wrapped about a cone of standing poles. Daylight entered at the apex, indirectly, for he could not see the sky. His faculties came back slowly. Hearing, now. A chorus of wild sounds outside somewhere. His nerves shrank and something inside him whimpered. But it was not the witches' sabbath he remembered hearing last. These were mournful sounds, the wailing and shrieking of women. His flesh was awakening now and he was sorry, for it crept with pain from head to foot. It began inside with an ache in all his bones and oozed toward the surface where his skin, or what was left of it, burned as if with fire. He had to lock his teeth to keep from crying out.

He lay on a low couch of fir twigs with a ragged and filthy blanket over him. The wig-

wam's entrance was a triangular gap in the bark sheets reaching up to the height of a man's shoulders and screened by a soiled blue stroud blanket like the one which covered him. Beside it on a mat of woven rushes crouched a very old woman in a filthy buckskin smock, sucking slowly at a short and very black clay pipe. She was watching him with one black malevolent eye; the other was a blue-white horror, blind with cataract.

The door blanket jerked aside and the Acadian stepped in, dressed now in gray homespun trousers and a linsey-woolsey shirt. A wooden canteen hung from his shoulder by a strap. He unslung it and knelt beside the couch to pour a trickle of harsh trade brandy into Roger's mouth.

"You are sore, my friend. Can you speak?"

"Yes."

"What happened to Peyal?"

"I do not know Peyal."

"He was the sagamore, the leader of these people. You hear those women? They mourn for him."

"I did not kill him."

"Who, then?"

"Gorham's men killed three Indians near the lake above Chebucto."

"Did you see them?"

"I saw one. He had a small stone fish slung about his neck."

"Ha! Did they scalp him—Gorham's men?"

"Yes."

"That was Peyal. Did they take the totem from his neck?"

"The fish? I do not think so."

"Did you take it?"

"No."

"How did you get the hatchet of Peyal?"

"I picked it up."

"You lie. You killed Peyal. Where is the totem?"

"I do not know."

The man squatted on his moccasin heels and whittled shreds from a piece of stick tobacco with his belt-knife. He rubbed them in his strong hairy hands and took the gray stone pipe from the thong about his neck. A grunt sent the old squaw forth, evidently for a coal.

"Listen, Englishman. I am your friend, me. A Frenchman and a Catholic. My name is Gautier. I live with these savages here at Shubenacadie. I buy their furs for brandy and such other matters as they desire. I have an Indian woman. I am one of them. I hunt with them sometimes, as you have seen. And if sometimes there are a few *chevelures* to be had"—a shrug, a roll of the small dark eyes, a wry smile—"what would you? A fur trader cannot afford to be too nice about the pelts his clients take, you comprehend. There is a good price for such things at Louisburg, a better one at Quebec if one wishes to send his goods so far. But that is not what I wish to talk about. I wish to talk of you, my boy. The savages want your life—for the life of Peyal, you comprehend. That is only justice. But it is not your English justice—they will not dance you on a rope. No, no! They do not understand such methods. It must be done slowly, slowly, so that death may come to the captive as winter comes to the earth, a little cold, a little warmth, a little storm, a little calm, a time to think, and a time to cry out . . . so!" He put his black-nailed fingertips together and drew them slowly apart. "Mercy they do not know. Pain they know—theirs is a painful world—and there is pleasure in the pain of others."

ROGER wondered dully how he could be in greater pain than now. There was a limit. The notion gave him a feeling of resignation, almost of indifference. He asked, "What will they do?"

Again the shrug and the wry mouth. "Fire, perhaps. Fire is not a custom of the Meeg-a-maage but they have joined in war-parties with the Abenakis and then always there is fire with captives. But there are other ways of drawing pain from a man's flesh, you comprehend. The tender parts first, the fingernails, the toenails, the privates, the mouth, the nostrils—but never the eyes or ears, for always the poor devil must see and hear. *Tiens!* The things I have seen! And the women—the women are the worst of all. When they turn you over to the women, you have passed the portals of hell, my friend. I have seen a man skinned alive. You think I am trying to frighten you? I tell you the truth. I tell you the Devil himself must have turned his face from certain affairs I have regarded, me!"

"Why are you telling me all this?"

Gautier brought his beady stare close to Roger's face. "Because you can do something for me and I can do something for you. A business affair, that! I am a trader, *hein*? The amulet, the little stone fish—I want it! Why? Because it is a totem of these people, a thing that brings good hunting, good fishing, good wooing and begetting, good everything. It is very old, they do not know how old. They say it came from *Sakawachkik*. The Ancient Ones, who journeyed to this country from the south when the earth was young.

"The missionary Le Loutre comes to this place, this Shubenacadie, several times a year and sings mass in the little chapel by the river, and teaches them to cross themselves. He talks about the flames of hell and they go in great fear of him. He brings them gifts of meal and blankets and hatchets and guns and they look upon him as their father. He informs them that their Munitoo, their Maker-of-the-world, is none but the Devil himself and must not be worshiped any more; and he gives them little pewter crucifixes and says they must not wear

the old charms any more. But what is the good father's paradise compared to their own Good Hunting Place? They do not want his heaven, although they greatly fear his hell. So they say, *'Ayah! Ayah!'* and cross themselves—and go on worshiping the devil and wearing the ancient charms together with the crucifix. So! You see? The little stone fish is important. With a talisman like that one can go anywhere, do anything, in the country of the Meeg-a-maage. No savage would dare to harm a hair of his head who wears it. On the contrary, they would ask him to come amongst them so that they might enjoy the influence of its magic."

"It did not save Peyal from an English bullet," Roger said.

"THAT was to be expected, my friend. It is well known amongst the Meeg-a-maage that the English have an evil medicine that the ancient totems cannot overcome. Nor can the totem of the *abbés* god, for the savages remember the Frenchmen of D'Anville perishing by hundreds on the shores of Chebucto despite the crucifixes about their necks. That, too, was wrought by the evil magic of the English. Against the English there is no talisman but that of bullet and tomahawk. The stone fish is for other matters. The stone fish is for peaceful things."

"I tell you where to find the amulet and you save my life, is that it?" A great clarity had come upon Roger's muddled mind. The little stone fish was slung about the neck of that *thing* in the lake above Chebucto, of course! But if he told what he knew, Gautier would journey there and get it, and whatever influence went with it. And how far was Gautier to be trusted then? Not a bit!

"But yes!" Gautier cried. "Where? Tell me!"

"First, how do you propose to save me?"

"That is easy—for me, my friend. I send a canoe to Beaubassin and fetch here the Abbé Le Loutre himself! He does not permit the slaying of English captives who may be worth gold alive. He uses the ransom money to buy guns and hatchets for his savages—for the glory of God."

"You are cynical, Gautier."

"I am a Catholic. The Holy Church is not to be condemned for the actions of a half-wild priest. Père Le Loutre is a little cracked on the subject of the English. That makes him equally useful to *le bon Dieu* and to the Devil."

"I cannot tell you where the totem is."

"*Sacre nom!* You wish to die?"

"It seems to me that while the totem remains unfound I have a chance to live."

Through his thin brown nose, with the sound that only a disappointed Frenchman achieves, Gautier cried, "You really think so, my poor friend? The thing is not so important as all that!"

The old squaw returned with a coal caught between two chips. Gautier clutched the unlit pipe in his fist, dashed the coal out of her hands, flung a parting, "*Sot!*" at Roger, and vanished beyond the door blanket.

In the next fifteen or twenty days—he soon lost count—Roger was convinced of his own shrewdness. The crone rubbed his cuts and bruises every morning with an evil-smelling salve of grease and crushed herbs, and twice a day brought him food, usually a bark dish full of boiled venison, partridge, hare or porcupine—once or twice he suspected dog—and various kinds of fish, the chief of which was very bony but rather sweet, apparently caught in springtime and partly sun-dried, partly smoked. The ache went out of his bones and the smart from his flesh. His chief discomfort was the multitude of lice. His bed blanket fairly hopped with fleas as well, but his nakedness spared him their worst ravages.

There seemed to be no guard except the old squaw but there was no chance of escape. From dawn to dark a succession of brown faces —men, women and children—examined him with the bright eyes of animals. And at night the animals themselves, the dogs, those half-wolves, prowled about the silent huts.

As the object of so much discussion Roger heard a vast amount of the Micmac tongue. It was guttural and monotonous, with a peculiar singsong intonation at the end of a phrase. When his ear became accustomed to the simple vowels he could distinguish many French words in the medley, adapted to their tongues by substituting *l* for *r* and making one sound of *b* and *p*, of *d* and *t*, and of *g* and *k*. Gautier, who visited him from time to time and brought a clay pipe and tobacco to help him while away the hours, enlarged upon these matters with the rather droll air of a schoolmaster.

"You are surprised at their mixed tongue, *monsieur*? But why? These people have known the French for at least one hundred and fifty years. And before that the Basques, who came to fish on the Banks and dried their codfish on these shores, two centuries ago."

Roger could not help thinking of Nova Scotia as a new country. It was a little bewildering to hear that Europeans had frequented this coast when Queen Bess took the throne of England.

"*Ces sauvages-là*—an airy wave toward the glitter of black eyes in the doorway—"are all baptized with French names, as their fathers were before them, by the missionaries. So they are Jean, Pierre, Bernard, Martin, Claude, Gabriel—and call themselves San, Peyal, Penaul, Malti, Glode, Cobleal, because that is the best their tongues can do. Sometimes they bear a by-name after the ancient fashion of the savages, and so that one you killed, you comprehend, was known as Bright Sun to mark him from the other Pierres amongst them. It is written in the *abbés* little book thus: Pierre-

dit-Beau-Soleil." And Gautier added significantly, "You will remember that name!"

Roger shrugged. That blend of self-confidence and indifference born of a belief in his luck, the true mark of the adventurer, was again strong in him.

There were other matters to be explained and Gautier explained them, with gestures, with the self-important air of one whose wisdom is enormous in the presence of a child. The Micmacs—properly Meeg-a-maage—were hunters and wanderers who scattered up and down the coast in small family groups in summer, when clams and fish were plentiful and the sea breeze kept away the flies. In winter they gathered inland where the moose and caribou hunting could sustain them, away from the coastal storms. They had numerous petty chiefs like the dead warrior, Peyal, but they recognized no supreme authority as a tribe except in the region of the Bay of Fundy. There Le Loutre exercised his remarkable sway over them, partly religious, partly mundane—for his bounty often kept them from starvation in the snow months—but chiefly by the force of a personality that stalked the forest like a flame. And by the fortune of coincidence, which made his family name that of an animal well known to the Micmacs, Le Loutre translated perfectly into Micmac. The short black-robed figure, the brisk and restless movements, the sharp and cunning eyes, the courage amounting to ferocity, the scorn of weather and distance. the faculty of bobbing up in unexpected places, all made him perfectly The Otter.

These Micmacs who wintered at Shubenacadie probably were the largest single group in the peninsula. Another vague gathering wintered in the interior somewhere toward Cape Sable, and a third in the island of Cape Breton. There were others along the Gulf of Saint Lawrence shore as far north as Gaspé, but of these Gautier knew little. Roger had pictured the great forest infested with these two-legged wolves and it was a shock to hear Gautier suggest that all the Micmacs in the peninsula did not number more than two thousand, and at most could not put more than four hundred warriors on the war path. "And," the trader added emphatically, "only a prophet—or Le Loutre—could get them all together at one time!"

ROGER thought of Cornwallis and his thousand redcoats at Halifax, and Paul Mascarene and his regiment at Fort Anne, all held within their palisades by the notion of a forest full of savages.

"It is incredible," he said.

"*Incroyable!* You think of your soldiers, no? Those! Besieged by phantoms! It is the forest they fear. That is a big enemy. Long ago we discovered, we French, that the forest is a friend to the swift and the bold, and is merciless to all others. *Voilà!* We range the great forest from Quebec to Mexico and the continent is ours, while you English sit with your tails in salt water like the butcher's cat."

"And if the English learn to move in the forest?"

Gautier was amused. His small brown eyes twinkled. "The English," he said profoundly, "never learn. Regard yourself! I have told you how to save yourself and—"

"Let us not return to that," said Roger coldly.

To enliven the monotony of these long and empty days he set himself to learn the language from Gautier, from the ancient squaw (whose toothless gums and withered lips, however, made her difficult to understand) and from the solemn children at the door. The men he never addressed. Something in their eyes forbade it and there were times when that silent malevolence brought a chill to his self-confidence, and again a reckless longing to have it over with, whatever it was.

Roger applied himself with a perseverance that would have astounded his Oxford masters. He had a gift for languages. In the Highlands he had mastered Gaelic, surely the most difficult of tongues. On the Continent he had acquired a perfect fluency in French and a good deal of Italian. His progress in Micmac delighted Gautier, carried away by his role of schoolmaster, but after a time the trader showed less pleasure.

"Do you hope, my deluded friend, that you can *talk* yourself out of the hands of these savages?" he asked scornfully one day.

"It passes the time."

"Ah, I am not sure that I should do so in your place. Time—life—these things are short sometimes. One should wish them to go slowly."

"You are morbid, Gautier."

"And you are mad."

From time to time the humdrum of this life was broken by the arrival of another party from their summer wanderings along the coast, a single family in a couple of canoes, or five or six families together. Roger listened for that painfully familiar yell which meant a prisoner, but there was none. There were scalps and heads, however, and then always there was an uproar lasting through the day and the night, with much dancing about a fire in the midst of the camp and the slaying of dogs for a feast. These were uneasy occasions, with a succession of grotesquely painted faces thrust abruptly into the wigwam door, emitting blood-freezing howls and regarding his white nakedness with the eyes of wolves.

Gautier vanished from these scenes as if even he did not feel safe, and later explained —a little shamefaced, it seemed to Roger—that no white man was permitted to look upon a head dance. The trader's eyes were uneasy. The Indians were hounding him for *bookta-*

wichke, fire-water, and he dared not let them have it. He kept his kegs hidden in the woods downriver because in the frenzy of the headdance they often came and rummaged his store. It would not be safe to give them brandy till the cold weather had set in and chilled their lusts a bit. Then he would buy the scalps they had taken during the summer and send the collection to Louisburg for the French king's bounty. Furs? They would have no furs worth buying until the snows came.

"Where do they get all these scalps and heads?" Roger asked one day.

Gautier pushed out his lips and looked exactly like an ape. "You will remember those four from Chebucto? *Bien!* That is a beginning. We shall have good hunting there next year. There are always some to be gathered in the region of Fort Anne, as you call our old Port Royal—deserters and wanderers outside the *banlieue*. But the best hunting, truly, has always been along the coast, where the *Bostoon* fishermen come in to lonely harbors for fuel and water. They are watchful when they go ashore, but when they return on board they have that droll belief of seamen in the security of their ship. So—a rush of canoes in the dark, a shout and a squeak, and all is over. Five, ten, fifteen *chevelures* to hang in the sun to dry. It happens every year, up and down the coast. You never learn, you English."

"Some day we shall teach you, my friend. And we shall teach a lesson that your savages, yes, and you Acadians, will remember forever."

"God let me live so long!" cried Gautier merrily.

The pursuit of knowledge and the steady shrinking of the daylight hours made the days pass quickly enough. But the growing nights became a burden on his nerves. He could not sleep soundly, for lack of exercise, and in the long wakeful hours of darkness his thoughts galloped furiously and fruitlessly like a caged squirrel on its treadmill. Sometimes, desperate, he resolved to break forth, regardless of the old woman, the dogs and the rest, make a dash for the riverbank, seize a canoe and attempt to escape down that mysterious red river in the dark. But when he stepped, however stealthily, toward the door the squaw stirred and muttered, the gaunt dogs growled outside and discretion swallowed valor. The wigwam was a good two hundred yards from the river. There appeared to be fifty or more of these dwellings arranged in a rude U with its open end toward the stream. The space down the middle was beaten bare and pocked with the shallow pits of cooking fires. On the riverbank itself stood two large log huts, one of which he knew was Gautier's store. The other bore a rude wooden cross and was evidently the chapel of Abbé Le Loutre.

He had questioned the trader adroitly about the locality and despite Gautier's evasiveness had learned that the Shubenacadie river flowed into a great arm of the Bay of Fundy somewhere to the north. But if he escaped down the river to the bay he would be farther from Halifax than ever, and in the country of the Acadian farmers, who would turn him over to the Indians without hesitation. So said Gautier. The way was upstream, then. He must follow the river to that long and narrow lake between the pine hills, find the portage to the lakes above Chebucto, and follow them to Gilman's mill stream. He guessed the distance as fifty miles. That was not far as distances went in this country, but a bark canoe was a tricky thing and a lone man pushing upstream would be overtaken in a few hours at most. To attempt the journey naked and afoot was madness. There was no way out. The treadmill had come full circle now and he gave it up—until the next wakeful night.

CHAPTER XIII

PEYAL'S WIDOW

THERE was a yell from the riverbank one afternoon, with the usual outcry and scurry in the village, followed by a prolonged babble in the midst of the camp. Gautier squatted at his favorite place inside the door, stricken silent in the midst of a lively tale of moose hunting in the Cobequids. Roger sprawled on his bed smoking the frugal mixture of trade tobacco and willow bark which the Micmacs called *tabagy*. The door blanket was flung aside and into the wigwam stepped an astonishing figure, taller and leaner than the common run of Micmac men, and wearing in addition to clout and moccasins the red coat of a British soldier and a thrice-cocked hat of black felt bound with silver lace. Bracelets of hawk-bells jingled at his wrists and ankles. Roger noted swiftly the faded buff facings of the coat—the uniform of Philips' Regiment at Fort Anne—and thought joyously, *By Jove, a friendly Indian!* His pleasure faded swiftly. There was nothing friendly in the painted face. The hard thin mouth, the set of the gaunt jaws, the bloodshot eyes with their black pupils dilating catlike in the gloom of the wigwam, all exhibited a ferocity beyond anything he had seen since his capture.

The familiar smell of the hut was overborne by a new sharp reek of sweat and bear grease. The strange Indian examined Roger from head to foot with a glare that could be felt. After a full minute of it he turned to Gautier.

"*Ho!*"

"*Kway!*" returned the trader politely.

A sort of confessional followed, the Indian grunting questions and Gautier stammering replies. There was something cringing and servile in Gautier's voice and manner. They were

discussing him, Roger knew. He could follow some of it. Finally the visitor jerked his chin toward the door and stepped outside, followed quickly by Gautier. The voices drew away and became part of the chatter still rising from the midst of the camp. The old woman spoke.

"You will die."

Roger made no answer. His skin was still prickling from that long and furious stare.

Toward evening Gautier came back. The man's bronze cheeks had turned a sickly yellow. He was sweating.

"You are lost," he said simply. He remained standing. There was a nervous air about him as if he were ready to bolt at any moment.

"What has happened? Who was that man?"

"That was Koap, who bears the baptized name of Jean Baptiste—San Badees, as the Micmacs say. The foremost warrior of these people now that Peyal is dead. And"—with an expressive roll of eyes—"the right hand, the forerunner of Abbé Le Loutre in all his machinations against the English."

"But this is good news!" Roger cried. "You tell me this missionary does not permit them to kill captives!"

Gautier burst out harshly, "Exactly! And they never do—in his presence. But he is not present, my poor friend. He is on his way by canoe from Beaubassin. And Koap says you must die because you killed Peyal—you must die now, before the priest arrives."

"There will be gossip," said Roger desperately. "You tell me the warriors confess to Le Loutre—"

"You are to be taken into the forest by the squaws. What happens there will be their secret."

"But if he learns?" persisted Roger.

"The warriors will blame it on the women. Squaws have no souls—that is well understood by Le Loutre." The trader lifted his shoulders and spread his hands, with a roll of eyes toward the smoky peak of the wigwam.

Voices approached, the clack and titter of pleased and excited women. Gautier dived past the door blanket like a frightened hare. Roger rose slowly and passed his black clay pipe, still fuming pleasantly, to the old woman. She took it, wordless, regarding him intently with her one good eye. There was no emotion in her wrinkled face. He had the impression that she had seen many like him come to be healed of wounds and beatings, to be fed, to be made whole for the supreme rite of torture and death.

Two stout matrons entered, with an eager and important air. They were dressed for festival in bright rags of petticoats and bed-gowns, got no doubt from Louisburg, with strings of colored trade beads around their fat necks and wound about their wrists, and fillets of red cloth about their hair. They bound his wrists tightly behind him and pushed him outside.

The flood of sunlight dazzled him for a moment. A screaming chorus rose about him and he saw a mob of females of all ages arrayed in buckskins and queer tatters of European finery, each armed with a thin rod of peeled maple or birch. So! Another beating! They scurried, giggling, to arrange themselves in a double line leading toward the trees. Pleasure shone in all their faces, commonly as dull as wood. His skin crept, awaiting the pain. It was not long in coming.

He started violently at the first vicious slash and ran his best. The women set up a cry, a long-drawn *"Aaaaeeee!"* and his back, his bound hands, his buttocks and thighs were assailed by a swarm of red-hot wasps as he passed. The air was filled with the swish and whistle of descending withes. They seemed to create a wind that blew him along. The faces on either side were a laughing brown blur.

The way led into the woods, a path made by fuel-gathering squaws. He had a wild resolve. After he had passed the gauntlet he would keep on, running like the wind, straight into the forest, and on and on. But after he passed the end of that squealing avenue the slashing at his back continued, with a patter of moccasins added to the shrill laughter. The younger squaws were running at his heels as easily as deer.

Fortunately the path was narrow and not more than two could strike at a time. But after a hundred yards or so the woods opened and he found himself running into a considerable clearing surrounded by large hemlock trees. A stick was thrust expertly between his legs and he went down on his face. He was dragged to his feet, gasping, and pushed backward against a slender post or perhaps a sapling tree. His wrists were untied, passed about the thing and fastened again behind it. Instinctively he looked at the ground about his feet. No sign of past fires there. Gautier had given him a gruesome list of agonies but it was death by fire that he feared most.

A SILENCE fell. The women faced him at a little distance, the whole panting mob. Their eyes still glittered with excitement and expectancy but only the older ones were laughing now; the young squaws seemed a little awed, nudging each other and wriggling uneasily. The switches had been thrown aside and he noticed the women in front fingering clam shells and leaf-shaped flints. It dawned upon him in a cold fit of horror that these were the tools they used in skinning and scraping hides. His gaze fastened itself upon these simple but now incredibly evil objects with a dreadful fascination.

The fleet-footed younger women made the forefront of the crowd. There were a few self-conscious giggles amongst them now and they

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began to edge toward him under pressure from behind. A bold one touched his naked stomach lightly and pulled her hand away, laughing. Soon there were several exploring his white skin. There were remarks which he could not catch because, apparently, they referred to things not mentioned in his lessons, and at each there was an outburst of merriment that spread over the whole gathering. He felt sick. He lifted his gaze resolutely, staring past that brown sea of greasy grins, and saw Koap standing in the path. The warrior called out something angrily and an old gaunt squaw came muttering to the front, thrusting the young women aside. The laughter ceased.

She stepped forward with one of the sharp flint flaying tools clutched in her bony fingers and made a sudden but expert slash with it, slitting the skin across his stomach from hip to hip. He was aware of a thin burning, as if a red hot pencil had been drawn across the skin, and he could feel a dribble of blood down his belly and flanks. The women uttered a long, low "Ah!" and began to press forward, thrusting out their flints and shells. He would not look down. But he shrank against the post. He could not help it. His staring eyes were fixed on the foremost squaw, a creature fit for this bad dream. She had appeared from the back of the crowd, her face rubbed with a compound of grease and charcoal, her long black hair wild about her shoulders. There was nothing festive about her clothing. She wore the shapeless buckskin smock, reaching to the knees, with a knotted thong about the waist, which was the common dress of women in the camp. She might have been any age from sixteen to sixty. Her dark eves burned like coals.

Without warning she turned her face to the sky and uttered a long and high-pitched cry. It was familiar, the mourning cry of the women on the day after he had come to Shubenacadie. It startled the other women quite as much as the captive. They drew back a little, staring at her. She dropped on her knees and rocked back and forth uttering that weird sound of a bereft she-wolf. The clearing rang with it. Koap came thrusting through the women. The man was furious. He flung a question at the she-wolf, yelling the words. Without rising from her knees she shrieked up at him a long harangue broken only by an intermittent sharp, hissing intake of breath. Once or twice Koap tried to break in, but it was useless. Roger strained to catch her words. In that harsh cracked voice he could recognize nothing except "Peyal," repeated frequently with the second syllable drawn out in a peculiarly dismal way.

The other squaws were murmuring now. Koap snarled at them and several old hags cried back at him in a manner quite different from their usual meek tones in the presence of men. Clearly a point had arisen on which the women could speak with impunity. There was even a strident satisfaction in some of the voices as if they rejoiced at the chance. Koap scowled. He made as if to strike one of them, and all the voices rose at once to a howl. He turned and strode away, and as he disappeared there was an outbreak of laughter and one or two unmistakable catcalls. Roger might have relished that if he had not felt an urgent need to retch; for Koap was very like a cat indeed, a gaunt and furious tomcat worsted by a party of indignant tabbies.

Someone unfastened his hands. He was borne along the path to the village in a stream of excited women all talking at once. The woman with the blackened face had vanished. In the common ground between the rows of wigwams the men of Shubenacadie were gathered, hearing with impassive faces a tirade from the angry tongue of San Badees Koap. The women pushed Roger into the familiar bark prison and the door flap closed. He eased himself down upon the couch. From his neck to the backs of his knees the skin was afire. Compared to that misery the slash across his upper belly, little more than skin deep, was a mere irritant. He was completely mystified at the turn of events. He had a pessimistic notion that worse was to come.

Gautier came, grinning and excited. "*Hola!* What a man! The luck of the Devil! How many come back whole from a caressing by the squaws?"

"Well?" gloomily.

The trader squatted. His small brown eyes gleamed slyly. "You are favored, my friend. The widow of Peyal has decided to take you to her bed."

Roger started up, and the movement sent a wave of fiery agony up his back. He sank back again. "You have a droll humor, Gautier," he snapped.

"I am serious."

"What! You mean that black-faced one? That animal?"

Gautier looked at him curiously. "They are not so bad when you get used to them."

"Impossible!"

"But possible! My God, are you the fool you seem? I have lived twenty years amongst these savages and in that time I have seen many captives die in such ways as I have related to you. Few—very few, you comprehend—were spared by the whim of a woman as you were today. Regard you, it is an ancient law amongst them that the widow of a warrior slain in battle may take a captive to her bed if she desires—to breed a son to take her husband's place in the tribe. *Parbleu!* That is a custom in all these fighting races whose warriors die faster than their women breed."

"A custom of mongrels."

"Call it what you like." Gautier was laughing. "You are sore, and when one's flesh is in pain one cannot—well, no matter. These women understand the flesh of mankind perfectly. You will be healed by your protectress with the most tender care. And you shall have time to adjust yourself to your new life. The woman has a long period of mourning to observe. When the moment comes—and she will choose the moment, not you—shut your eyes and play your part gallantly. Use your imagination, my boy! You must pretend she is a beautiful virgin under the spell of a sorceress, like the old hag in the tale!"

"Impossible!"

GAUTIER'S expression changed swiftly. He snarled, "Impossible! Always this 'impossible'! You wish to live? Even a fool wishes to live. *Bien,* here is your life. A gift from God or the Devil or whatever it is you English worship. Take it, then! You belong to her now, whether you wish it or not. You are her captive, understand? You will hunt and fish with the men of her family. Your food, your clothing will be prepared for you as becomes a man. But you will have no privilege beyond these. If you attempt to escape you will be slain like a dog—or handed back to those she-devils to be flayed alive. Listen, my friend, it is a good life out there in the forest. It is the way a man was meant to live. When you have spent a year with these people you will never wish to leave them. There are hundreds like you, mated to savage women in the woods between here and the great lakes of the Saint Lawrence."

"When does Abbé Le Loutre arrive?"

"*Peste!* You still hope for ransom? You will never see the priest? Tomorrow you depart with the woman Wapke, with Luksi, her father, with her brother, Le Bras D'or, and his squaw and little ones."

LE BRAS D'OR

"Where?"

The shrug, and the expressive hands.

And on the morrow they departed, in two canoes, with an east wind keening in the bare trees by the river and a cold rain slipping down. No one came down to the bank to see them off, there was no word of farewell at all; a few curious heads at the doors of wigwams, and that was all. There was no sign of Gautier. Nor of San Badees Koap, except that the door of the small log chapel was open and a squaw was sweeping it out with a bundle of birch twigs in preparation for Abbé Le Loutre.

Like Theseus entering the labyrinth, Roger embarked upon this new journey into the unknown with a careful eye for marks along the way. But it was such a long way and with so many marks that he forgot them. He could look for no help from his charcoal-smeared Ariadne. She took the squaw's place at the bow paddle where he could see only her swaying buckskin back, and she stared straight ahead and said not a word. Luksi, her father, sat on the stern thwart, steering. The captive lay on skins along the bottom, lifting himself—warily, because all movement was painful—to stare at the passing banks from time to time. Stowed on the bottom also were a brass kettle, a musket, a pair of French hatchets, a fish spear and a pole with one end sharpened and hardened in fire, which Luksi used to punt the canoe upstream in shallow places. The rest of their household goods were stowed in a pair of large baskets of maple splints, shaped like a peddler's sack with a broad base and narrow neck, the top sealed against the weather by a

circular wooden lid, and the whole fitted with leather straps for carrying.

Roger's back was a torment. He could put his hand behind and feel the scourged skin of his buttocks and loins, a mesh of fiery ridges. Farther up, between his shoulders, many of the old cuts had opened under that enthusiastic welting by the squaws. The cold rain chilled him in his nakedness. He was tempted to pull one of the furs over him but refrained for fear of seeming womanish in the eyes of old Luksi, who wore nothing but a clout, or in the eyes of the children in the canoe behind, who wore nothing at all. Not far from the village Luksi left the broad stream of the Shubenacadie and turned his bow into a shallow tributary flowing from the east. A struggle began. There were long stretches where the stream rattled thinly over gravel bars, and all had to jump out and wade upstream pushing the canoes with their hands—all except the youngest child of Le Bras D'or, an infant of three months or so, strapped to a carrying-board in the canoe bottom and gazing up at the rainy sky with eyes like small black buttons.

They did not break their fast until mid-afternoon, when the canoes were drawn up on the bank and Luksi conjured a fire of pine splinters with the aid of a battered French tinderbox. The meal consisted of *moosok*, lean moose-meat cut in strips, dried in the sun, pounded to a fibrous mass, mixed with blueberries to give it a tang of sweetness, and moulded in round cakes—a journey ration with which Roger was to become wearily familiar. They squatted about the fire in the shelter of a massive hemlock tree while the meat stewed in the pot, and the squaw of Le Bras D'Or untied her smock and fed her infant, still strapped to the board, from a brown breast that hung long and flaccid like a half-filled shot pouch of polished leather. Later Roger was mildly astonished to see her chew a mouthful of the stringy journey-meat and place some of it in the child's mouth with her work-calloused forefinger. She was a plump and shining creature, well named Swaakwe, "She-seal," although she bore the Christian name of Mahlee, from the Sainte Marie of the missionaries.

Her husband was a stocky man, rather ugly, with broad flaring nostrils and a face deeply pitted with the scars of smallpox. His name puzzled Roger until old Luksi informed him casually that Le Bras D'Or was born beside the shore of an inland sea which the French knew by that name.

"Where is that?" Roger asked. Gold was an intriguing word.

"Oonamaagik, the Foggy Country"—with a gesture toward the east.

Golden Arm and the Seal had two youngsters besides the infant, a boy about five years and a girl of eight or nine. The boy had a parted upper lip and was known appropriately as Little Hare. The girl was Mahlee like her mother. The baptismal zeal of the missionaries had filled the Micmac villages with Mahlees.

Luksi was an active old fellow with fine teeth and keen black eyes. There was much gray in his topknot and his face was deeply lined. Roger guessed his age at sixty. It was quite fruitless to hazard the age of the women. He had observed at Shubenacadie that the female savages matured early, became thick and stolid after bearing the first child and were hags soon after thirty.

HE studied Wapke whenever he got a chance. She renewed her greasy black mask from time to time from a small earthenware pot in one of the basket-packs. She smeared it on thickly and the stuff sagged with the warmth of her face and gave her the look of a haggard Negress. The long hair flittered about her face in untended tangles. He wondered how long this mourning ritual would last. The others talked to him freely. Wapke held herself aloof and was silent except when making a direct request or a command. The buckskin smock gave no hint of her figure. She was active as a cat, but so were all Micmac women except the very old. Her hands were long and strong. Her legs below the smock were smooth and round and she had the thick ankles of her people.

She had a charming name. Wapke, Morning Light. It was even more charming than that, for this Micmac word for dawn pronounced with the proper nuances meant literally, "The opening eye of the day." But he had seen a fat and hideous squaw named Shining Star.

When evening came the little river had dwindled to a shallow brook overhung with naked maples and bordered by a crimson mass of huckleberry bushes. The voyagers waded now, working the canoes along with care, for the least touch on a sharp stone meant a slit in the bark and a long halt to melt balsam and mend the leak. Roger's teeth chattered. He wondered what his brother Charles would think if he could see him now—naked in the rain, in October, in the wilds of America. Charles with his mulled wine and a good fire leaping on the hearth at Suddenholt! The hanging bushes rasped his raw back and the stones of the stream bed bruised his bare feet; he was weary and cold and his belly groaned for food, but for all that something in him exulted when he thought of Charles. Charles and the Fiat Club, Boyce and the parson and John Harroll and old Sir Jeremy and the rest, toasting King James over the water perhaps at this very moment. By Jove, they'd have died, the lot of them, in half an hour of this!

A gap in the bushes and the ghost of a path, a trace, no more, running off into the dusk un-

der the trees. A portage, evidently. Luksi swung the canoe on his shoulders, upside down, with a quick powerful heave, and walked off with it. Golden Arm followed with the other. The Seal burdened herself with her family goods and her husband's gun and set off in the wake of the bobbing canoes, which seemed to swim, capsized, a foot or two above the bush tops. Her infant was strapped to her broad back and and she herself was a waddling bundle of skins and baskets. Wapke stooped to her own goods, checked herself sharply and turned her black inhuman mask to Roger. She pointed imperiously.

"*Pemadega!* Carry it!"

He hesitated. filled with a male resentment. "That is woman's work."

"Thou art less than a woman. Thou art a *Thing. My* thing. *Pemadega!*"

She picked up a stick and he saw that she meant to be obeyed. He stooped and awkwardly began to sling the baskets about himself and pick up the bundled skins. He could not remember how the Seal had done it—she must have had four hands! How could anyone carry the bulky skin bundles, the fish spear, the setting pole, the kettle, the musket and two hatchets with a single pair? Wapke picked up the gun and the tomahawks. Unwilling to trust him with the weapons, probably. The rest he managed somehow, but he staggered under the load, and the baskets galled his sore back. Wapke walked behind.

"Some day," he said aloud in English, "I shall pay off all these scores, my fine she-wolf—on you and your whole howling pack."

If she understood she made no answer. He was tempted to say it in her own tongue but he could not think of the word for revenge.

The bushes opened and surrounded an old camp site, apparently not used in a long time. There was space for three or four wigwams. The ashes of the fires had long since melted away and grass had grown about the charred knots that remained. The Seal had dropped her load, except for the solemn child strapped to her back, and was busy cutting poles for her wigwam. Roger wondered if he should do the same. Luksi and Golden Arm squatted under a big pine, watching with a glint of amusement in their black eyes. But Wapke had decided not to trust him with the hatchet, it was clear. She cut the poles herself and set up the wigwam with a swift skill that he had to admire. The Seal hacked firewood from an old pine snag behind the camp site and Luksi's tinderbox provided the magic flame. They ate stewed *moosok* again—Luksi and Golden Arm first, then the squaws and children. The leavings went to Wapke's *thing,* last of all.

In his naked state it was a boon to have shelter at last from the wind and rain. Luksi's couch of fir twigs was in the place of honor opposite the door. Wapke lay down on the right side of the wigwam and motioned Roger toward the left, tossing him a bearskin for bedding. Luksi snored loudly. The warmth of the fur was grateful but Roger could not sleep. He twisted and turned for a long time, always with due care for his tender back. At last Wapke came and bent over him.

"Why do thee not sleep? Tomorrow will go hard with thee."

"I wish to sleep but my back does not."

Her dim form glided to the baskets. In a moment she was back again.

"Lie on thy belly," she commanded, and rubbed his inflamed back with bear grease and herbs of the kind used by the old squaw at Shubenacadie. Her fingers were gentle. He went to sleep almost at once, lying on his face.

CHAPTER XIV

"WHEN THE MOON IS ROUND"

IN THE morning the sky was clear and cold, with a nipping wind from the west. Even Luksi and Golden Arm were glad to squat by the fire, and the old man motioned Roger to come and warm his nakedness there also. Wapke busied herself with some scraps of caribou hide and her bone needles. When evening came she flung at Roger's feet a pair of moccasins and a breech-clout with its thongs attached.

He put them on and said, "*Kaan,* I thank thee." She sniffed, and busied herself with the evening meal.

The clout was barely enough for decency and of no use whatever against the cold, but with his loins thus girded he felt better. He stepped up and down the little clearing to get the feel of the moccasins, and in his satisfaction whistled a bar or two of "I'd fee'd a lad at Michaelmas" and performed a few steps of the Highland fling. The Seal and her children gaped in sheer astonishment. Golden Arm scowled, but old Luksi grinned. What Wapke thought was not apparent.

Three days they lay at this place while Luksi and Golden Arm hunted for fresh meat without success. Roger was eager to go with them but Wapke forbade it. He put it down to malice and was sulky at his squaw-tasks—fetching water from the brook, gathering deadwood for the fire, and ferns for the added comfort of their beds. Each evening she rubbed his back with the evil-smelling salve and examined the stone-cuts in his feet with the brisk and impersonal air of a groom with a horse. On the fourth morning they struck camp and moved off along the trace toward the south, Luksi and Golden Arm carrying the canoes, then the children, then the Seal and Roger wtih their multiple burdens, and Wapke bringing up the rear, and late that day emerged from the forest on

the shore of a small lake, where they camped. Here they stayed a week. The two Indians hunted every day. They were eager for moose or caribou but nothing came to the pot except the flesh of porcupines, which tasted to Roger like elderly mutton steeped in spruce gum. They were stoical about their ill luck until a day when Golden Arm came into the camp grunting that his gun was "sick" and flung the thing to the ground. He had come upon a moose, a fine fat cow, and when he put the gun up there was nothing but a flash in the pan. He had re-primed hastily while the cow stood, as if she knew that Golden Arm had a sick gun. He pulled the trigger again, and this time the gun would not move at all. The hammer, "the little thigh," would not fall. And the cow ran away.

"I have killed meat and am a man," Roger said arrogantly. "Jegulaase! Away with thee!"

The gun lay by the fire where he had thrown it, a rusty old French *fusil* with a split stock bound in brass wire. It would be left there when they moved on, Roger knew. He had seen such weapons on the refuse heaps behind the wigwams at Shubenacadie. A gun out of repair was sick and, in fact, dead. The traders encouraged this belief, and so the tribes offered an insatiable market for firearms.

He sauntered over to it carelessly, conscious of their eyes, picked it up and laid it across his knees, asking them the names of the parts. Finally with an immense casualness he picked up a broken knife used by the Seal for scraping her pot, and unscrewed the lock; the cock first, then the pan spring, the pan guard, and finally the long brass screws that passed through from the left side and held the lock plate in place. Their eyes bulged.

The hammer spring and the cam of the trigger were crusted with rust, and the whole movement was choked with the fine dirt of—he guessed—forty or fifty years in the forest. He scraped the parts carefully, dug out the dirt, and rubbed all carefully with bear-grease dipped with an impudent finger from Wapke's little pot. Now he put the gun together, reamed the touch-hole with a piece of wire and handed the weapon to Golden Arm.

"Behold, this gun is well."

Golden Arm took it dubiously and tested the charge, still in the gun, with his ramrod. He

caught up his powder-horn, primed the pan, and aimed the weapon at a boulder in the lake. As his brown finger pulled the trigger home, the pan flamed, the muzzle jumped, belching fire, and a small feather of water leaped and died beside the rock.

"*Wah!* Indeed this gun is well!" An incredulous smile broke over the pocked face.

The Seal pointed to Roger with wide eyes. "He has magic."

"Fool!" snapped Wapke. "He has only the wisdom of those who make these things."

Luksi addressed her sharply and with an air of finality. "This now is a man."

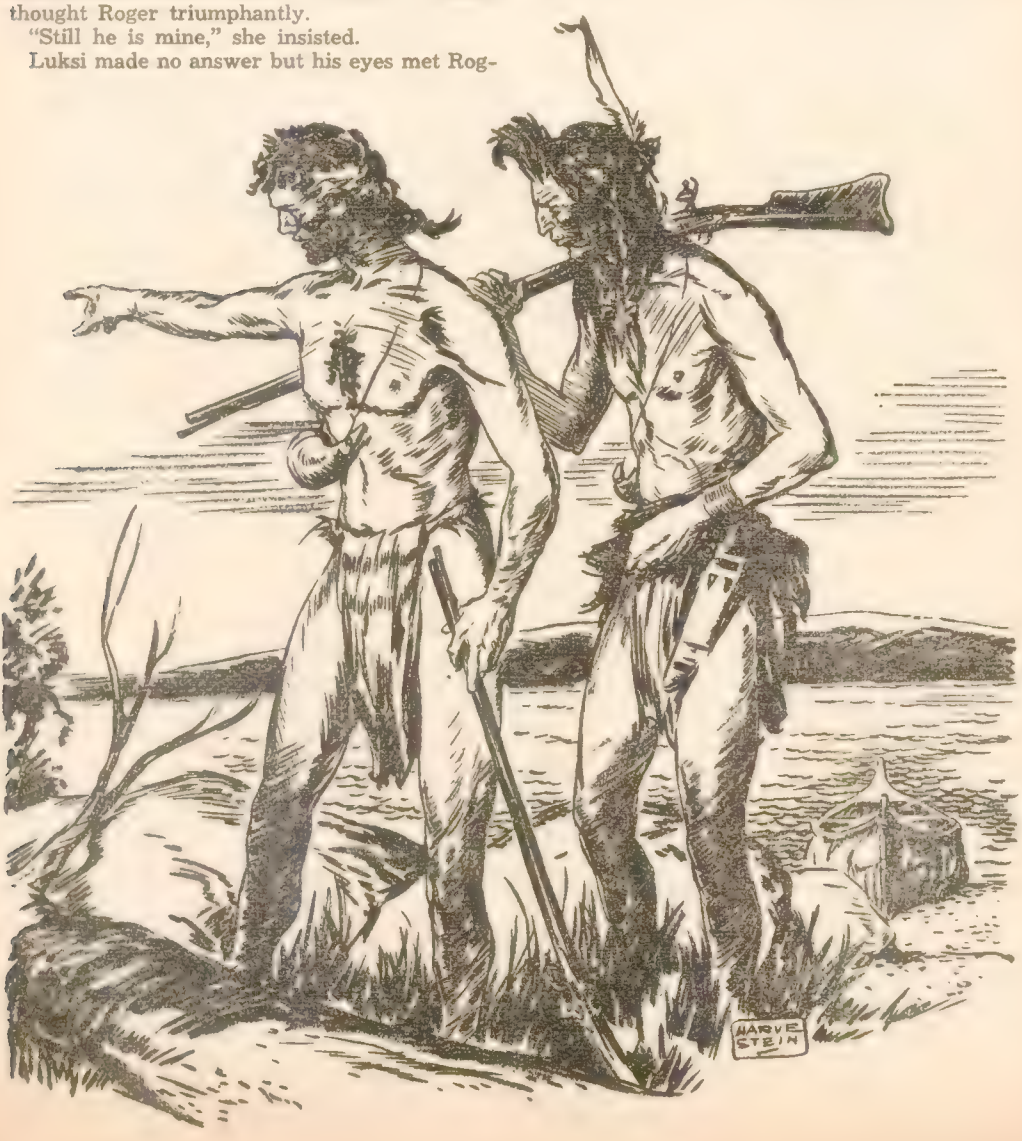
He did not use the general term for men but the precise word *cheenum*, meaning man as distinguished from woman or child. *Or thing!* thought Roger triumphantly.

"Still he is mine," she insisted.

Luksi made no answer but his eyes met Roger's in that whimsical look which means the same thing in all languages, man to man.

Next morning when the men rose in the frosty dark for the day's hunt Luksi grunted, "Come!" and Roger went. If Wapke heard, she said nothing.

Every morning in the still air of daybreak when no scent would carry far, the Indians hid in a clump of hackmatacks in the midst of a wild meadow a mile from the camp, while Luksi mimicked the mating call of a cow moose with the aid of a birchbark horn. The old man was hopeful although, he admitted, the mating season was nearly past. To Roger it was simply a study in endurance. Each took a fur which he draped about his shoulders against the



morning cold, squatting in the frosty wild grass for an hour, two hours, three hours, while Luksi made the ridges echo with that wild and weird sound. It afforded Roger a certain satisfaction to observe Golden Arm's brown buttocks turning faintly purple and prickling with gooseflesh, and to hear old Luksi's teeth rattling between the calls. He decided they were no tougher than many white men—the Highland Scots, for instance. What the savage had was an ability to retire within himself, to the comfort of some inner warmth, abandoning his skin to the cold. An effort of will.

There were several of these aching vigils in the frosty dawns, all fruitless, and Roger was glad when the day wind sprang up in the west and put an end to them. The rest of the time was spent in still-hunting along the marshy swales which lay between the pine ridges. In the afternoons the late October sun fell hot between the uplands and the gooseflesh of the morning gave way to streams of sweat.

On one such afternoon Golden Arm, suddenly despondent, passed his gun to Roger. "This thou hast made well. Can thee make it see meat?"

Within twenty steps a pair of caribou rose from the waist-high grass. They seemed to come out of the earth, an apparition of dark brown hairy bodies, astonished eyes and horns like bare thorn trees. Luksi fired hurriedly and missed. Roger fired. The bull went down and kicked in the grass. The cow ran off a little way and stood, snorting and staring toward her fallen partner after the stupid manner of caribou. Luksi addressed her aloud.

"O Ka-le-bo, stand whilst I put new fire in my *paskowa*, for my belly rumbles empty and I need thy skin for winter." All the while he was re-loading his musket with deliberate movements, not to startle her. When he put up the gun again he said reverently, "I thank thee, Shining One," and pulled the trigger. Down she went.

They ran forward whooping and pulling forth their knives, and when the throat veins had been cut to bleed the meat, Luksi said solemnly to Roger, "There is luck in thee."

Golden Arm grunted, "From this time the gun is thine as much as mine."

They walked back to camp and in the lordly Micmac fashion told the women where the meat lay, drawing a little map with a stick. The Seal caught up her hatchet and skinning tools and started off at once. Wapke hesitated, her fine eyes gleaming in the horrid black mess of her mourning.

Arrogantly Roger said, "I have killed meat and am a man. *Jegulaase!* Away with thee!"

Her nostrils flared. She sucked in a great breath and looked at Luksi in appeal, but her father's eyes were hard. She turned and rummaged viciously for her skinning tools, hurling the contents of her basket right and left. But she went, and the hunters lazed beside the fire. Golden Arm chuckled from time to time and old Luksi said in mimicry "*Jegulaase! Hé! Hé!*" They all grinned at each other across the fire.

It was dusk when the squaws returned, weary and bedraggled, each dragging a quarter of caribou by the shank. Perspiration and the scrape of twigs and bushes had done queer things to the stuff on Wapke's face. The mourning mask was no longer horrible, it was ludicrous. He smiled, and she saw the smile and thereafter kept her back toward him while she and the Seal prepared the meal.

Roger ate with the other hunters, as of right, and the meat was doubly sweet for the knowledge that the women must follow him at the pot.

THUS they journeyed, pausing to hunt at intervals, a feckless existence with fits of furious energy and periods of lethargy when the men sprawled or squatted by the fire, smoking the harsh *tabagy* in Luksi's little pipe, passed from hand to hand, and talking of old hunts and journeys in the droning voices of dreamers, while the women sat silent in the wigwams working on fur garments for the winter, and the children with bright-eyed interest tortured frogs and snakes and other small creatures that came easily to their hands.

Their slow wanderings followed the course of a stream called by a long name, Musquodoboit, in whose upper valley they had determined to winter. Their hunting luck was like the weather, good and bad. Roger's first blind stroke of hunting fortune was not repeated often enough to justify that superstitious faith of Golden Arm, but he acquitted himself well. It was a business very different from stalking deer in the corries of Argyll but the principle was the same—the stealth, the patience, the ever-vigilant ears and eyes, the overmastering resolve to find and kill.

He learned the language of the forest, whose words were a broken twig, a print in the mud, a leaf displaced, a few hairs caught in the bark of a tree, a hundred other matters written plainly for the seeking eye, which together made a tale. He threw himself into it and enjoyed it, striving to out-hunt the others, to outendure them in the chase, to out-suffer them in hard weather.

Always he had been muscular in a slim well-moulded way, in the fashion, say, of a well-born Englishman of athletic tastes. Now his thews were hard, his skin a smooth and polished brown like good saddle leather. He kept his hair in a queue, tied with a thong. When they found a dead eagle by one of the streams he thrust a long tail feather in the root of his pigtail on a whim—and kept it there. Because his beard itched and became greasy with hand-

to-mouth eating, he shaved it frequently, using Luksi's hunting knife carefully whetted on a piece of slate-stone, and a bit of looking-glass from Wapke's basket—a process of never-failing interest to his companions. The Indians were hairless about the body except at the crotch and armpits and they plucked out the few black wisps that grew on their faces.

The men addressed him as "Thou" and sometimes, "O Man," for Wapke's ears. But one night at the fireside Luksi said, "What is thy name amongst the English?"

He answered carefully, "Roger."

"Lojul!" Luksi could not get his tongue around it. Nor could Golden Arm.

Wapke was listening in the wigwam door. Her eyes glowed like a cat's. "O Man," she called, "thy name is Bosoley."

He turned his head and said deliberately, watching Luksi and Golden Arm, "Beau Soleil is the name of one dead. I am a living man." He saw hostility rise in their dark eyes.

Luksi spoke. "This that *was* Bosoley is no more. The woman has taken a captive in his place, after the custom, to lie with her and breed sons in the name of him that was. Now thou art Bosoley, O Man! Speak no more empty words, for the woman is my daughter and I will not see her shamed before women."

"*Ayah!*" agreed Golden Arm, opening his sleepy pig's eyes very wide.

The Seal looked alarmed.

"For how long?" asked Roger. "For how long am I Bosoley?"

"Thou heard!" snapped Golden Arm. His cheek worked under the pocked skin. "Thy life is hers. How long is a life?"

Deuced long! thought Roger. But he said no more. There was too much violence in that air about the fire.

Winter crept upon them like a ponderous white beast out of the north, with cold, seeking claws in the wind, with pauses now and then as if crouching for a spring. Snow flew in small hard specks that rattled on the wigwam skins. One night it whitened the ground along the river, and vanished in the afternoon sun.

And then miraculously out of the frosts and the first tentative snows, out of the dreary November rains, came a Saint Martin's summer of hot and drowsy days that hung the shallow river valley in a blue haze and turned the night air as soft as a woman's breath. It was all very unreal—as if you had braced yourself for a blow and felt only a caress. And it came at the time of the new moon. Wapke pointed out to Luksi and Golden Arm that yellow slanting sickle in the west and talked to them briefly in a low voice.

In the morning she struck the wigwam and carried the skins and baskets down to the river. She returned for a haunch of moose meat hanging in a birch tree by the camp, and motioned Roger to pick up the paddles.

Luksi sat with Golden Arm beside the fire, smoking the little pipe. From her wigwam the Seal and her children watched. Roger turned to Luksi with an inquiry on his lips and the old man said curtly, "Go!"

At the river, where Wapke waited beside the laden canoe, she motioned Roger to the man's seat at the stern. He took it, mystified, but pleased at the prospect of steering the craft. The river had risen under the rains and the passage upstream called for every bit of wit and strength he had, but he enjoyed it thoroughly. There was a happy sense of mastery in it, like riding a good horse at the hurdles. Again he thought of his brother, Charles and the Jacobite club. How very far away all that seemed now! At sundown they came to a glen where the pine woods rose in shadowed walls and a strip of wild meadow ran beside the river. A small brook fell down the hill amongst the pines, and near the point where it boiled into the river was another ancient camping place. There were the usual fire-reddened stones all intergrown with grass, the space for three or four wigwams, the surrounding trees bearing the healed scars of old hatchet marks, the indefinable air of a place where humans had tarried a while and gone. Roger had come to know these for signs of the old savage life, since diverted by Le Loutre and other agents of the French king and made to flow and even to clot about the Acadian settlements, where it could be best influenced and controlled. The Micmacs, all but a few bands of outcasts and primitives, had abandoned the ancient ways for something made in France.

"In this place we shall winter," Wapke said simply, and busied himself setting up the wigwam and preparing the evening meal.

"And the others?" he asked, waving a hand downstream.

She answered indifferently, "They will come."

"Tomorrow?"

"When the moon is round."

CHAPTER XV

THE GOLDEN WOMAN

SUNSET burned along the western rim of the glen with the final flare-up of a dying fire. The pine tops made a black saw-edge against the glow. The river writhed and gleamed along the glen floor, reflecting the swiftly changing colors of the sky and lifting its voice now in the evening hush. And now came that soft and unreal darkness again, the still and humid air of a summer night falling magically over a landscape already given up to winter. Relaxed after the day's exertions and comfortably aware of a full belly, Roger sat by

the wigwam door watching the tip of the young moon rise above the trees. He longed for tobacco. Wapke had gone down to the river. A fire of dry pine roots from a stump at the waterside made a fine red glow in the dusk. From a stillwater up the river came the long call of a loon, weird and mournful like the voice of all this emptiness.

When Wapke returned to the fire he looked up diffidently—and looked again, startled. His first wild thought was that he was under visitation by one of those lascivious night-fairies of whom the young braves jested sometimes by the morning fires, a sort of Micmac succubus. Certainly it was not Wapke! No daughter of the Meeg-a-maage would let herself be seen thus by a man, even a husband. For this creature was nude—and unabashed. She came to the fireside all wet and gleaming from the river and stretched her arms across the blaze toward him, regarding him with large and glittering black eyes. He had come to accept Wapke as a shapeless caribou-hide smock with a black repulsive mask at one end and a pair of muscular legs at the other. The bronze pixie before him was young and slender as to waist. Her cheeks had that light olive hue of Micmac girls and young women before too much weather and the smoke of cooking fires has darkened them, and before the endless drudgery has coarsened and lined the skin. Her hair showed the ministrations of a wooden comb, sleek and black, falling loosely behind her shoulders.

Roger trembled with some emotion he did not recognize. Lust he had known, and fear. It was neither of these things. He crouched in the doorway, waiting. After an intolerable time she spoke—and the voice was the voice of Wapke.

"O Bosoley," she said softly, "this is the moment I have longed for ever since I saw thee at the killing-place."

He made no answer. He felt himself blushing. He had foreseen something like this, of course, although not in this shape; but now that it had come he was profoundly disturbed—he was shocked. He felt absurdly like a prim girl confronted by her first kiss. That cynical advice of Gautier! He had prepared himself for the amorous demands of a middle-aged squaw, protecting himself with an armor of disgust. With Wapke in this form his guard was gone, and all that was English and aloof in him resented his defenselessness. She was tempting.

IN A nimbus of firelight the golden flesh stood lit and glowing against the darkness, as if she were the living heart of the night, of the whole black wilderness. He was struck with a preposterous thought. Was it She? Was this the Golden Woman? Had it all come to this, a union with Wapke in this desert of shadows?

She observed his hesitation and said, like any woman anywhere, "Is there some other? Had thee a woman at Chebucto?"

He answered honestly, "No."

"The white squaws look sick always," she announced contemptuously. "Look at me, Bosoley! I am strong and alive. I am like a young maple by the water. In my arms thou shall find such pleasure as no *sakumaaskwe* could give thee. Also," she added practically, "who is there to cook thy meat and make thee garments?"

He shook his head woodenly. Who, indeed?

"Am I not well made, Bosoley?"

"As the moon," he answered. At his words she broke her pose and dropped upon her knees before him, saying softly, "Then let us make love together, Bosoley."

How many women had said that to him in other lands and other tongues! And how easy it had been to take what they offered and pass on, without the shadow of a thought! Yet it was just that, the shadow of a thought, that hung between him and the splendid creature at his feet, the notion of a plunge into darkness from which there was no return. Gautier's voice came back to him: "When you have spent a year, you will not wish to leave . . . hundreds like you mated to savage women in the woods. . ." All his impressions of this enormous loneliness confirmed the Acadian's words, and all his instincts rebelled.

"No!" he said violently.

She sat back on her heels and said in a trembling voice, "Thou cannot refuse me, Bosoley. Thy life is mine."

"My life is my own," he answered stubbornly, "and I must follow my own destiny. Let me go back to my people!"

Her face was shadowed by the fire-glow at her back, but he caught the white flash of her teeth as she answered, "No! Never!" Then, in a wheedling voice, "I am *nedaje* for thee, Bosoley. I, too, have my dreams. I dream of thee at night. I cannot eat for thinking of thee. Yet"—her voice went hard as flint—"if thou refuse me and make me a thing of laughter to the squaws at the camping-places, I shall have thee slain!"

He stared past her into the darkness from which there was no escape. Alone, he would perish in this winter-touched waste—and he was quite sure that his destiny lay otherways. He tried to conjure up that sunlit vision of the Golden Woman, for strength or guidance, but she would not come. Instead, strangely, he seemed to see that scornful young woman in the Downs with her red-gold hair.

"Wapke," he said desperately, "many moons ago, across the Big Water, I made a vow on the totem of my fathers that I would have no more to do with women. I have kept my vow and want no woman. If I should break my vow. . ." he groped hopelessly. The Micmacs had no

word for sin. "If I should break my vow, some great evil surely will befall me—and thee!"

Her eyes went wide. He had struck the one chord in her that vibrated more loudly than pride or hunger or love-sickness—the superstitious one. But shrewdly she said, "This promise to they fathers cannot last forever. There must be a woman, else their seed will die."

"I must wait for a sign," he declared with a preposterous smugness.

She nodded slowly as if this were the most reasonable thing in the world. Then, with the utmost innocence, she uttered a piece of wisdom straight from Mother Eve. "Bosoley, lest my people laugh at me, lest my men-kind kill thee, we must share a wigwam, thou and I. In the fullness of time there will come a sign."

WINTER was a bitter thing. Life was a thread, no more, quivering in the north wind, never far from breaking. When they ventured into the great cold they wore leggings to the crotch, hooded cloaks of beaver skin, separate sleeves of fur which tied behind the shoulders, huge fur mittens, and wrappings of thin caribou hide about the ankles and feet, which were thrust into great moccasins stuffed with dried grass. Within each wigwam the squaws kept burning a perpetual fire that filled the cone with smoke and forced them to lie close against the floor. The Frost Giants screamed and smote them furious blows, besieged them with white armies and tree-cracking frost artillery, and paused with a silence that made the ears ache, baited them with two- or three-day thaws and leaped to smite again. The stream was too rapid to freeze completely over the run past their camp, but the white banks put forth lips of ice that grew as the winter deepened, and the dwindling gray water yielded up a mist that hung like a cold white smoke along the valley.

In the vast silences the least sound carried far. From the forest, now near, now far, came those mysterious knockings which the savages knew only as *keaskunoogwejit,* "the ghostly woodcutter." And on nights of intense frost came the steady *woomp-woomp-woomp* of pressure cracks ripping the thick ice of lakes upstream and echoing down the wooded glen like thunder. No wonder they believed in giants!

Spring was a joy that came slowly, with fits and starts, the sunshine at hide-and-seek with snows and rains and fogs. Roger had lost count of the weeks but some time in April or May they broke camp after daubing the canoe seams with fresh gum and paddled down the river to the sea. There they lived easily on clams and fish and ducks, wandering slowly eastward along the coast.

Sometimes they encountered groups like their own and tarried together a day or a week, exchanging tales of the winter past. Roger was accepted as one of them, addressed always as Bosoley. His black eyes and dark skin and the nose bequeathed him by his Norman ancestors made this acceptance easy, and if they noticed the European cast of his features they said nothing. The long intercourse of French and Micmacs had produced so many who looked exactly like him.

Summer was the time of ease, of warmth, of indolence. If hunting or fishing failed, the squaws could dig up a meal with a stick on the nearest clam flat. Hence all their camps were pitched by some sandy inlet where the mingling of fresh water with salt produced at low tide a stretch of malodorous mud. When autumn painted the hardwoods they moved inland, thrusting their canoes up another lonely river to a wintering place somewhere towards Oonamaagik, the Foggy Country, which Roger now knew to be Cape Breton. He cursed himself for not paying more attention to that crude chart of Nova Scotia which Old Hux used to spread upon the hatch. He had a vague picture of a peninsula jutting into the Atlantic with a large island at one end, but he had no notion of the distances.

Winter again, and another struggle to keep alive. Another long heart-breaking spring, another journey to the coast, another lazy summer. So it went. Roger had long ceased trying to count moons and reckoned in winters as the Indians did.

From time to time, in the fleeting summer moons, Wapke asked solemnly if his fathers had given him a sign. Always the answer was no. He marveled at her patience but it irritated him.

When they encountered other wandering savages, there was news to which he always listened carefully. The English town was growing at Chebucto. "Konwallich" had gone back across the sea—this was a surprise—and the sagamore of the English now was "Opsum." Evidently Hopson, the cool soldier who saw the usefulness of ranger troops when Cornwallis could see only their indiscipline. "Opsum" had raised new ranger companies with volunteers from the regiments, from the emigrants and the footloose New Englanders, and was sending them deep into the forest to punish the Micmacs for their raids. Even the stiff regulars had been thrust out boldly from the palisades of Halifax. The mutinous regiment at Fort Anne had been brought to dicipline by ruthless shootings and hangings, of which the Indians spoke with awe. And as a result of all this the English were getting a firm hold on the Acadian Country where Le Loutre had reigned supreme so many years.

And Le Loutre? The Otter was gone *eloowawe,* crazy. He talked no more of Sessooglee (Jesus Christ) and Kejnoomahlee (Virgin Mary) but raved instead of fire and slaughter.

threatening the dull Acadians with the wrath of the savages if they took the oath of allegiance to King George, commanding them to burn their farms along the south side of Fundy and withdraw toward the Saint Lawrence. "*Ayah!*" the Indians said. The Otter himself had burned the Acadian village of Beaubassin, church and all, for an example.

But the most astonishing tale concerned the fierce San Badees Koap of the Shubenacadie mission. Koap had proclaimed himself chief of the Micmacs, had gone to Chebucto and made a "peace" with the English in their name! What did that mean? Roger asked. They answered with glee that Koap had fooled the English. Even now he was sending war parties to take scalps at Chebucto. But they added casually that Le Loutre was urging the tribes to remove beyond the reach of the English rangers—toward Louisburg, where their families would be safe, and whence they could launch war parties against the English at their pleasure.

WHAT did it all mean? Something lay behind all this—it was in the wind. Open war between England and France, an end to that ill-conceived peace of '48? That would mean, ultimately, a struggle to the death between Halifax and Louisburg. These speculations aroused a ferment in Roger at a time when apathy had almost taken possession of him. His hopes of escape had faded and gone long ago. He was watched too closely when they were on the coast, and the interior in winter was a prison in itself. At the approach of this year's warm weather he had become aware of a growing fascination in the savage life and in Wapke. This is the way it goes, warned the voice within. You hope for a time, then bit by bit you let yourself go, and the woman and the forest do the rest. But the voice was feeble now and he heard it with indifference.

All this the watchful Wapke knew. After her long waiting she began to see a glimmer of the sign. And one lazy summer afternoon she resolved to put it to the test.

The camp was by a brackish lagoon, common along the coast, which the Acadians called *barachois*. A small river flowed through a beach of fine sand when the tide was low. As the tide rose, the stream was thrust back upon itself and the combined waters filled a wide and shallow trough between the beach and the pine woods. At ebb tide the mingled waters rushed out again and there was a flat of reeking mud where clams were plentiful and fat.

Roger had gone around a pine point to bathe in the *barachois* and he was lying in the sunshine to dry himself when Wapke came. She sat down beside him.

"Hear me, Bosoley. For a long time we have been man and wife in the eyes of our people and long ago I put my father from the wigwam lest he know the truth, saying it was a custom of the *Aglaseaou* to have their wives alone. All this time I have been faithful to thee and thy promise to thy fathers. But, Bosoley, I am a woman and too soon I shall be old and ugly in thine eyes. Now is my summer and I wish to love and bear fruit before my winter comes."

He was silent for a time, lying with eyes closed against the sun. At last he raised himself on an elbow and said slowly, "Wapke, I have thought upon these things and this is what I see. Look there at the Big Water. It is clean and beautiful, like thee. And there is the river, clean and strong. Yet where they mingle"—stabbing finger at the steaming flat—"is mud and a stink. That is the wisdom of Munitoo who made these things—and thee and me."

"It is false!" Her voice went hoarse with rage.

"There is some other woman in thy heart!"

"Yes," he admitted, finally.

"And this promise to thy fathers—that was a lie?"

He groped for the words he wanted. "When I was young I took the warpath, far across the Big Water. It led into strange places and there were women along the way. But at last I wearied of the warpath and of them. For war and women come easily to a young man but they leave him no reward. I said in my heart, 'No more.' But when I came across the Big Water there was a woman. She had no eyes for me and I told myself I did not want her—but I did. Something in my heart was troubled when I thought of her. She was the first woman I had wanted that I could not have."

"And thou wish to go back to her—to this woman who does not want thee!" she cried scornfully.

"She would not have me now—and there are other things I want far more. I wish—" He groped again. The Micmacs had no word for riches. "I wish to be a trader like Gautier, but at Chebucto. I wish to have a great store of goods and live as white men do. And when I have gathered enough I shall return across the Big Water to live in the home of my fathers."

"Without a woman?" she asked, astonished.

"No woman will matter then."

"What is she like, this *saakumaaskwe?*"

He smiled. "You would find her very ugly, Wapke. She has red hair and green eyes and there are small brown speckles on her nose."

"*Heugh!*" She spat. "All this is true?" she added suspiciously.

"May the flesh rot from my bones if I lie to thee!"

She shrank at that. In a world haunted by whimsical gods it was not safe to make such dangerous suggestions. But she said proudly, "I, too, am wanted by a man I have denied."

It was Roger's turn to be surprised. "Who?"

"San Badees Koap. His heart is sick for me."

He was disturbed. Koap was not good enough for Wapke. "You like him—San Badees?"

"He is strong and well made, Bosoley. He would give me sons." He did not miss the challenge in her voice. She added, "If my father knew the truth of thee and me he would slay thee."

Roger was silent.

Then she said carefully, "But if I say that I am weary of thee, that thy seed is barren and I wish for sons, that I would mate with San Badees who is the great sagamore of our people now, as Peyal was . . . and if I say I must have blankets and bright cloth and many ornaments as becomes the bride of San Badees . . . then my father will sell thee to the whitecoats at Louisburg."

He opened his eyes and sat up then, startled. "Louisburg!"

"War is coming between the *Wenjoo* and the *Aglaseaou*, and this time one will drive the other out. Then thou can return to the home of thy fathers, Bosoley." For a moment he was stunned, but when he turned to her in a rush of gratitude she leaped up and stood aside, looking down at him with proud dark eyes. With dignity she said, "Do not touch me, Bosoley. Not now. For I go to meet the father of my sons."

"I shall never forget thee, Wapke."

"Thou never knew me," she answered, and was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRUE CUCKOO

THE office of the Commissaire-Ordonnateur was in a large and busy building of Caen stone at the corner of the Rue St. Louis and the Rue du Quai. Like a drift of brown leaves twenty or thirty savages squatted in the autumn sunshine of the Quai, talking in slow gutturals and gazing past the Cale de l'Intendance, where their canoes were drawn up, to the bright blue harbor water.

From the stony beach east of the quay arose the strong reek of split codfish drying in the sun. The anchorage was dotted with fishing vessels gathered for the return to France with the summer's catch, and farther out in the roads three or four French West Indiamen awited convoy across the Atlantic.

The waterfront swarmed with fishermen chattering in Norman, Breton and Biscayan dialects. A few soldiers in grubby white uniforms wandered aimlessly along the quay. Outside the Commissary door lounged a corporal's guard of the Compagnies de la Marine in white tunics and blue breeches and gaiters, admitting the savages in small groups. Most of these

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brown wolves had come to cadge powder and shot for the winter's hunting, but several had English scalps for barter and there were three or four gaunt and naked prisoners for sale—New England fishermen by the look and speech.

Slowly the Indians filed through the doorway. It was three hours before Luksi and Golden Arm were admitted with Roger between them.

The Commissaire was an irritable man in his fifties with rheumatic movements and a sickly face. Beside him sat the town major of Louisburg, a pair of fierce mustaches addressed as Loppinot. The sale of Roger to His Most Christian Majesty was soon completed. Luksi tried to haggle but Aide-Major Loppinot cut him short in brusque and badly accented Micmac. The old man turned away with a little billet addressed to the keeper of the King's stores. Golden Arm went out before him, licking his animal lips as if he tasted fire-water already, but Luksi turned in the doorway and looked back at Roger, saying uneasily, "Bosoley, this is my daughter's wish, not mine, for I had come to look upon thee as a son. Yet," he added indignantly, "you are strange men, you English, who cannot abide an old man in the wigwam with your women! Now I go to join her with San Badees, who will let me place my blanket opposite the door as an honored guest."

With that he was gone, and Roger had a twinge of regret, almost of self-reproach.

Major Loppinot fingered his superb mustaches and said in unskillful English, "Your name, prisoner?"

"Sudden. Roger Sudden." A pen scratched somewhere in the chamber.

"You from Fort Anne?"

"No, from Halifax."

"Ha! You sojer, eh?"

"A settler, from London."

"'Ow long you weeth those savage?"

"Four years. I was taken soon after I came to this country."

Major Loppinot was plainly disappointed. "You know nothing, then. *Eh bien,* you are now a prisoner of France. You 'ave friend at 'Alfax weeth money, eh?"

"No."

A mouth and a shrug. "That ees un'appy for you. But *mordieu,* it is a better place to leev, our Louisburg, than that meeserable 'Alfax!" and briskly, "You shall work on the walls weeth other prisoner. If you are gentle you shall 'ave a leetle leeberty about the town. Eef you try to run away you shall 'ang. That ees all!"

He bawled an order to the corporal outside and Roger was marched away by two blue-legged marines. The narrow cobbled streets rang with the sabots of fishermen and townsmen and there was a clack of women's tongues from every open casement, but no one gave Roger more than a glance. The passage of a naked English prisoner was too commonplace.

They crossed the town and emerged into an open space under the ramparts at the east end. There in the shadow of a tall bastion sat a long low building of black stone with narrow, heavily barred windows. Inside, Roger found a dim cavern where forty or fifty ragged and half naked men sprawled on pallets of straw after a day's work on the fortifications. They leaped up at once, crying questions, but finding that he knew nothing recent of Halifax and nothing at all of Fort Anne or Boston they drifted away to their pallets again. The majority appeared to be New Englanders, fishermen captured by the Indians whilst getting wood and water on the Nova Scotia coast. There were half a dozen soldiers of Philips' Regiment and one or two of Warburton's. Some had been there for years and all assured him he was lucky to be alive. Most English captives taken by the Micmacs fell into the hands of Le Loutre, who ransomed those whose friends had money, and collected a handsome profit. The rest he turned back to the savages as worthless—and the savages promptly took them into the woods, knocked them on the head and sliced off their scalps. Le Loutre then bought the scalps, which had a firm price at Quebec and Louisburg. Only those savages who distrusted the mad priest in matters of payment made the long journey to Louisburg with their trophies, living and dead.

The men were clad in the most miserable rags, cast-off clothing of a townsfolk who, with French thrift, cast off nothing until the very patches were threadbare. Some had sabots, some wrapped their feet in bits of cloth or sail canvas; most were barefoot. They were shaggy and unclean from long lack of soap.

Roger mentioned the word escape and they told him in a sort of humorous despair that there was only one escape from Louisburg. They pointed it out to him from the ramparts where the prisoners labored with pick, shovel and wheelbarrow that sunny October day—a cleared knoll in the scrub forest to the west, with a gibbet stark against the sky. Gallows Hill!

ROGER shrugged and leaning on his shovel turned and looked northward over the town. It was compact, not more than fifty or sixty acres within the half circle of the walls, yet in its narrow streets swarmed a population of close to three thousand. Some buildings were of stone, some had a stone lower story and a wooden upper, but most were of wood, shingled in the American fashion—all dominated by the fine brick-and-stone mass of the hospital of the Frères de la Charité and the similar mass of the Royal Barracks in the Bastion du Roi, with their tall belfries over all.

Louisburg had been a-building thirty or forty years, not long as Europe measured time, yet the weathering of the unpainted wooden houses had given it the gray and ancient look of a garrison town in, say, Brittany. He had an impression of great strength. The fortress stood on a point of bleak moorland between harbor and sea, the land side guarded by massive walls of earth faced with stone and standing thirty feet above the general level. There were six bastions, the Bastion du Roi, a citadel in itself, separated from the town by a dry moat and containing the main barracks and the residence of the governor. All of these were well supplied with cannon. Beyond the walls lay the moat, wide and deep, bristling with sharp stakes for lack of water; then the stone-faced counterscarp, the smooth green fall of the *glacis,* and finally an open moor half a mile wide, bare as a billiard cloth between the fortress and the woods. No man could cross that space alive while a single musket pointed from the ramparts.

And from the sea? The harbor entrance was guarded on the east by a battery on Lighthouse Point, where the tall stone *tour du fanal* burned cod-oil in a huge and ingenious lantern every night; Battery Island sat in the very mouth of it with thirty-odd cannon in its embrasures. From the town the battery of La Grève watched the anchorage. And at the head of the harbor squatted the Grand Battery with its twin sixty-foot stone towers and its heavy artillery, ready to rake the entrance or the anchorage at will.

He thought of Halifax, its miserable wooden palisade, the pitiful log-and-earth "forts," all dominated by undefended Citadel Hill; the forest which came to its very skirts, a perfect

cover for hostile war parties; and the town of squalid huts and the people, unfitted to make a living on land or sea. What a comparison!

The French were not hard taskmasters, and if the prisoners' fare and lodging were miserable they were not much worse off than hundreds of poor fishermen, who lived like barreled herrings in the Rue du Pont and Rue Toulouse and along the Quai. The worst hardship and the one which reduced the inhabitants of the prison to despair was their mere situation, prisoners of France in what the diplomats of Europe pretended was a time of peace. Only the soldiers had the faintest hope of ransom, mumbling of a time when Cornwallis had ransomed a Lieutenant Hamilton and sixty others taken in a raid by Le Loutre's savages. But that had cost Cornwallis well over eight hundred pounds and the governor now was tough old Lawrence, who was not likely to pay a penny's tribute for their release.

The work on the defenses was not bad. What they hated was the quarrying and breaking of stone at Cap Noir for the facing of the walls and counterscarp. In the late autum they were taken up the coast in sloops to L'Indienne, where in shallow pits they dug coals for the Louisburg garrison. And through the winter itself they were generally busy clearing the streets of snow, cutting firewood in the garrison fuel yard, on stormy days picking oakum on the drafty prison floor. Sometimes there were odd jobs to be done about the houses of army officers or their merchant friends, and then there was usually a small gratuity, a few sous, an old coat, a *manoque* of tobacco leaves or even a small jug of thin wine. In this way Roger covered his nakedness with a pair of worn sabots (stuffed with straw against the winter cold), a pair of homespun breeches patched like Joseph's coat, a linsey shirt, a red flannel nightcap of the sort worn by fishermen, and the red-and-blue rags of a French artillery tunic.

He thought he had known every vicissitude of the climate in his wanderings with the savages, but winter in this corner of the Cape Breton coast was a thing beyond his experience. The site of the town had been chosen with a view of defense and nothing else. It was exposed to every wind that blew, and the gales were more frequent and blew longer and harder, and the snow was deeper and the frost more sharp than anything he had known.

The northeast and southwest arms of the harbor froze over but the anchorage remained free until spring, when the great sea pack came drifting down the coast, poured past Battery Island like an invading fleet and filled the harbor with grinding floes. But long before the sea ice came, before the first breath of the wet spring wind, indeed while ramparts, streets, roofs, the Quai, the decks of wintering ships and all the country roundabout were still crusted white in the harsh cold, Roger found hope in a most unexpected place.

HE was sent to shift some wine barrels in the cellar of a cabaret in the Rue du Quai. He found the *Veritable Coucou* without difficulty by the sign that swung in the February wind, and turning inside was blinded for some moments by the dim interior after the dazzle of the snow outside.

He announced in French, "I have been sent from the prison on the orders of Captain—"

"*Zut!*" snapped a woman's voice. "There is no need to cry my affairs to the world!"

His eyes had grown accustomed to the indoor light by now and he saw that the place was empty—it was about nine o'clock, the quiet hour between the morning drams and the afternoon calls for dinner wine—except for himself and a brisk, black-eyed woman in a brown gown and white handkerchief. She came from behind the bar, inspecting his rags, his beard, his shaggy hair with an impersonal contempt which doubtless came of much dealing with the *canaille* of the waterfront. Her face was rather thin, which made her eyes seem large and bold and drew the eye to her full lower lip. Her waist owed something to tight laces and her bosom fillled out the bodice in a manner that suggested a sylph gone a little to flesh.

"What are you staring at, *cochon*?" she said coldly.

"At a ghost, madame. It is—let me consider—seven years, eight years since I saw it in the flesh. Not quite so much flesh, if you will pardon me. What are you doing here, so far from Paris, Madame Ducudrai?"

Her eyes were enormous now. She stared at him with a furious curiosity. Then, in a startled whisper, "It is you, Monsieur Soudain—Roger! My God, what have they done to you?"

He stepped toward her with a thin smile and she backed away.

"One changes one's appearance with one's fortune, madame."

She had her taut back against the bar now. She protested hoarsely, "You were so young, so gallant, Roger! Now—now you are. . . ."

"Ragged and dirty, madame, that is all."

"No! There is something else—don't come nearer. Don't touch me! You—you have changed. You look cruel. You are like a savage!"

He stopped and said ironically, "My dear, I am a savage. I have lived for years with savages. But you, madame—you have not changed so very much. How charming and how fortunate that we should meet again! Your husband, does he still conduct the dancing lessons?"

"He is in New York," she said in that whispering voice, and with that incredulous stare.

He raised his eyebrows. "So far?"

"He is a dancing master there."

"I see! And in his absence it is only right that a captain of the Compagnies de la Marine should keep an eye on the *Veritable Coucou*—a witty name, that!—and send a bit of prison labor now and then to see that madame keeps her pretty hands from toil!"

"He has been kind to me," she returned defiantly. "But you— How comes it that you, an officer of Prince Charles, are in this prison here?"

"How, madame? When France kicked out the Chevalier Charles, I came to Nova Scotia—Acadie, I beg your pardon—with the intention of making a plantation. The savages removed me, with some violence I may say. The commissaire-ordonnateur buys English prisoners for the work on the fortifications. *Voilà!*"

"But you are not an enemy of France!"

"I seem to be an enemy of all the world. Don't look like that, madame. I do not quarrel with my fortune, why should you?"

"There never was any man like you," she murmured, as if to herself. "You—" She checked herself sharply. "But that is all past and gone, you comprehend? Captain Johnstone—"

"Ah!"

"He has become my very dear friend. I could not let him know that you—that I—we . . ."

"One understands perfectly, madame. And one congratulates you both. You may rely on my discretion. Don't look so incredulous, *ma chère!* Four years amongst the savages have taught me many things I lacked across the sea. And now, there are some casks to be moved—"

"Roger," said Madame Ducudrai, "you will not so much as whisper?"

He gave his mouth a twist. "One gossips a good deal in the Chateau Louis-damné—to pass the time, you understand. And the guards of the Compagnies-Marine—" He shrugged expressively. "Those dogs have long ears! Now if one had employment in the town all day—posting a ledger for some merchant along the Quai, for example—"

"You must know that prisoners are not permitted on the Quai."

"But why?"

"There are English ships, smugglers from Alfax, from Boston, in the summer."

"Ah! Precisely why I could be very useful to some merchant on the Quai, madame. I speak and write English and French well. After all, I too have bled in the service of the Chevalier, like your very dear friend, and surely France owes me something for my pains?"

"If I persuade my friend to arrange this," she said with a hard mouth, "he must never know who you are. You must never reveal—"

"*Ma Chérie,* I am silence itself. Four years in the forest! *Mordieu!*"

"You swear?"

"Upon my heart!"—a hand on his heart, a bow, a wide sardonic smile.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DOOR

THE establishment of Rodrigues et Fils was on the Quai near the corner of the Rue Dauphine, with a fine view and smell of the fish market and within convenient reach of the fuel yard. It had other conveniences for trade and profit. To the east ran a narrow lane bordered by fishermen's huts and sheds and ending at the shore of a small lagoon. The lagoon lay half in, half outside the walls, presenting the military engineers with a very pretty problem. They had solved it by running a pile bridge across from the Maurepas Bastion to the shore battery of La Grève and facing its outer side with sharp palisades. Sentinels patroled the bridge constantly or inconstantly according to the wishes of M. Rodrigues and others who dealt in contraband, and with a suitable bribe to the officer of the guard it was possible to pass the slender *bateaux* of the fishermen under the bridge and between certain of the palings. A long stony beach ran between the lagoon and the harbor to the flank of lonely Rochefort Point. And so the business of M. Rodrigues flowed in two distinct channels, not very far apart: Legitimate trade with France and the French West Indies and Canada passed over the cobbled Quai under the eye of the ordonnateur; the no less profitable trade with Halifax and New England went by way of the beach and lagoon. All of which interested the prisoner-bookkeeper Sudden very much.

M. Rodriques found him intelligent and attentive to his duties. After a time he was glad to make a permanent arrangement with the director of the prison. The Rodrigues *comptoir* was a small chamber at the front of the big warehouse, facing on the Quai. The chief clerk was a Basque like Rodrigues himself, a thin man with a hacking cough and a face as yellow as snuff. He and Roger worked side by side at a simple desk of planed pine under a large leaded window looking out on the harbor. From the interior of the warehouse came mingled smells of wine and spirits, vinegar, sugar, tobacco, coffee, tea, bacon, tar and gunpowder, a not unpleasant blend, to Roger the very smell of prosperity.

He thought, This is what I want. Some day I shall have it!

His belief in his destiny, his faith in the Golden Woman leaped in him fiercer than ever. Neverthless, adversity had taught him more than the mere discretion he had mentioned so flippantly to Madame Ducudrai. He had learned that whether you hunted caribou or cash, you must have perfect knowledge. And so as his careful quill recorded casks of molasses, of *tafia,* of right Jamaica, of sugar,

of olive oil; tobacco pipes and Negro slaves and butter and flour and stockfish; casks of wine—Bordeaux, Aubagne and Saintonge; herring nets and *dorée* anchors and candles and nails and silks and sails—he committed these matters carefully to memory, with their cost and selling price, their origin and destination.

So, too, he watched and listened when men came with goods to buy or sell, especially after the ice went out of the harbor and traffic began with the open sea. Above all he listened for English accents. Sometimes he heard them, New England accents usually, but always beyond the *comptoir*, out of sight. After such occasions Rodrigues conversed with his chief clerk in Basque, with a careful eye on the *prisonnier-commis* Sudden.

But there was much to be learned for all that, from the ledger entries and particularly from a small journal which came under his eye from time to time, recording the bribes, large and small, in Halifax and Boston as well as Louisburg, which paved the way for contraband and broke the laws of King George and King Louis in a stroke. There was an enormous profit in all this. The rate of profit on legitimate trade was comparatively small; Rodrigues' books for the previous year, 1753, showed a mere thirty per cent. But the volume was immense.

Louisburg was headquarters for the French codfishery, to which fifteen or twenty thousand men came every year from the old country, quite apart from the busy shore fishery of Cape Breton itself. And there was the rich matter of supplies for the garrison, and for outposts as far away as Beauséjour in Acadie, and for the warships and Indiamen whose rendezvous for convoy across the Atlantic was Louisburg. But more than any of these matters was the fact that Louisburg stood at the sea crossroads of Canada, France and the West Indies, and flourished as an *entrepot*.

Roger's labors in the counting-house brought him a small wage which he was obliged to take in goods. In the course of four months he got himself coat and breeches of stout blue cloth, a pair of square-toed French shoes, a hat, a change of shirts and stockings. In addition, Rodrigues awarded him wine and tobacco, which he shared as far as possible with the inmates of the one-time magazine in the angle of the Bastion Brouillant.

Spring dragged its dreary length across the calendar. It was June before the last of the ice vanished from the deep woods, and Louisburg sat shrouded in gray sea fogs with occasional bursts of burning sunshine. Fishermen and traders found their way in and out of the harbor by some instinct of their own, and the Quai roared with life. The Rodrigues warehouse, like a vast cow-stomach, swallowed and disgorged masses of merchandise while his clerks drove their quills furiously to keep pace. There were rumors of war—the annual *canard*, said the sick Basque indifferently. What did it matter if those people in Europe called it peace or war? Between French and English in America there was always war.

One day in August M. Rodrigues confirmed this, bouncing cheerfully into the *comptoir* to announce that "we French" had drawn blood in the far reaches of the Ohio. Coulon de Villiers had done it—ah, Coulon, what a boy!—and this time his *coureurs de bois* and Indians had taken a force of English provincials under some young idiot named Vashinton. A place called Great Meadows—a coincidence *parbleu!* Wasn't it at Grand Pré here in Acadie that Coulon had slaughtered the English seven years ago? A traveler, that one! Well! A beginning! Next year, who knows? One certain thing—next year the Louisburg garrison was to be increased by two battalions—regulars! Regiment Bourgogne, Regiment Artois—straight from France! How that would brighten the bored eyes of our little ladies!

Certainly it brightened the eyes of M. Rodrigues. His thick fingers twitched as if he felt the fat contracts for supplies already.

Three or four days later he twitched a single finger at the prisoner from the door of his private *cabinet*. Roger laid down his pen carefully and walked inside. He had often itched for a peep at this little chamber, which had a separate entrance on an alley which led into the Rue L'Estaing.

A worn drugget covered the floor and a painted King Louis looked down from a painted horse upon the wall. There were three chairs, a stove, a window of opaque glass lozenges and a shelf which held nothing but a rusty fragment of bomb-shell left by the New Englanders in '45.

M. Rodrigues (nobody had ever seen the *fils*, who was said to manage a branch of the family business in Rochelle) was a squat and swarthy man with an enormous head which he made appear even larger by a wig of a queer rusty color and of the texture of picked oakum. His eyes were large and black and a little bloodshot, and his face was round and tight and rough with little pimples, like a Seville orange gone brown. His mouth was a knife-slash across the lower section of the orange, with a glimpse of bad teeth when he smiled. He had small silver earrings and wore on each of his little fingers a gold ring set with a large emerald.

HE closed the door and stood for a full minute with his thick cotton-stockinged legs well apart, staring hard in Roger's face.

"Monsieur Soudain," he said, "you are a gentleman of fortune, I believe?"

"Of ill fortune, so far," Roger said.

"Ah well! It seems, *monsieur*, that your

fortune has changed." Another hard glance at the prisoner. Then, with his gaze fixed on the old bomb fragment, "One is given to understand that you served as captain in the army of the Chevalier Charles Stuart, in that unfortunate affair eight or nine years ago. You fled to France and spent some time in exile."

"That is correct," murmured Roger politely. "I suppose Madame Ducudrai—"

"No names!" cried Rodrigues severely. "One learns also that you were one of the settlers at Halifax, where you have land granted by the English government."

"Correct."

"You asked for employment at the Quai because you entertained some hope of escape that way, did you not?"

Roger's cheek went warm. "Yes."

"Ah! But escape is not easy, as you have seen. What were your desires in Halifax?"

"To gather a little money and commence a business of some sort."

"What sort of business?"

"I do not know, *monsieur*—but yes, I do! I am familiar with the savages and it seems to me that I could do well in the fur trade."

Rodrigues pinched his round blue-stubbled chin with a thick forefinger and thumb, and it made a little rasping sound. "An Englishman in the fur trade in Acadie risks his own pelt, my friend!"

"I am prepared to risk mine."

"Ah! There you speak well! And a trader who moves about the country and uses his eyes and ears can no doubt find other ways to turn a sou, eh?"

"That is my hope, *monsieur*."

"Monsieur Soudain," said Rodrigues, inspecting the scrap of iron with unflagging interest, "I have watched your work and I am impressed. You seem to realize the importance of figures in the conduct of affairs. Yet—it seems a pity that a man young and ambitious should be tied to a stool in a *comptoir*. Now, I am a man of broad affairs. I am always seeking ambitious men who know how to move about the country and have no fear and—shall we say—not too fine a scruple?"

Roger thought of the Rochester coach and smiled. "You interest me, *monsieur!*"

"Good! Good! Well, there is unfortunately a state of strain between the English and French in America. I say 'unfortunately' because I am aware of business opportunities in the English portion of Acadie which, as a Frenchman, I cannot pursue. I have surmounted this obstacle in other places with the aid of such intelligent gentlemen as yourself. Business," said Rodrigues grandly, "knows no boundaries."

"Exactly," murmured Roger politely.

"Very well, I have an affair to propose to you, Monsieur Soudain. I propose to enable you to reach 'Alfax—"

"Eh!"

"—in order that you may pursue the fur trade and such other matters as you desire. Do not interrupt, please! I have an agent there, a private banker who will advance you certain sums from my account. You will pursue your affairs in your own name, you comprehend, but I shall require a semi-annual statement of profit or loss, and you must provide exact vouchers and inventories. You will render these accounts to my agent, who has my complete confidence." He paused, then snapped, "You find this acceptable?"

"Yes!" Roger stammered. "Yes, of course! I am—a little overwhelmed, *monsieur*."

"You are a gentleman, one learns, a man of honor," pursued the merchant harshly, "and I give you my confidence. I give you also three-fourths of the profits. Is that enough?"

Roger gaped at the man. He had a feeling that he would wake up any moment and find himself on his pallet in the prison.

"You will never mention my name nor that of my agent in your transactions in Acadie," continued the rasping voice. "You will on no account speak of your little stay at Louisburg. You will inform your friends that you have been in the hands of the savages, and no more. You understand"—in a smoother tone— "that a merchant like myself who does business with all the world must preserve a secrecy in certain matters."

"I APPRECIATE that, *monsieur*."

"Tonight you will be conducted from this place to a smuggling vessel bound for 'Alfax. You will have a sealed paper, which you will on no account open until you reach that port. Upon it you will find the name of my agent. As soon as possible you will present the paper to him—you will go discreetly you understand?—and he will have his instructions. You will govern yourself by his advice. That is all I think. No! One thing more. You will need some English money until you reach my agent. *Voici!*" A small trickle of guineas into Roger's unsteady palm.

A dozen questions fluttered on Roger's lips but Rodrigues forestalled them with a brusque "Not another word! I shall expect you to be diligent and faithful—and discreet. I give you more than freedom, Monsieur Soudain. I grant you an opportunity such as few young men receive in the new world or the old. Be sure you make the most of it." He paused. Then rapidly, "You shall not return to the prison in the usual manner this evening. I shall make an excuse to the officer of the guard. You will remain in the *comptoir* until dark. After that you will be guided by Manuel. And now, *au 'voir!*"

"*Au revoir,*" Roger said huskly, "and one thousand thanks—"

"Bah! *Bon chance, monsieur,* and remember . . ." A thin smile, a brown glimpse of

"Monsieur Soudain," said Rodrigues at last, "you are a gentleman of fortune, I believe?"

teeth, a thick finger pressed against the lips.

The supper hour came with a clatter of sabots homeward from the Quai. The warehouse fell silent. The clerks departed. The summer run of mackerel had appeared off the harbor two days ago and from the frying pans of the Rue Dauphine now came the smell of them in oily gusts. The silent Manuel brought a square of bread, an onion and a piece of cheese, which Roger washed down with a mug of sour wine from a cask in the warehouse. He settled himself to wait for dark. It was an eternity.

Night at last, with the sea-fog creeping in gray wisps between the warehouses, and the scrape of a fiddle somewhere down the Quai, and Breton voices raised in song. A cautious knock on the door, Manuel opening it, and a bustle of purposeful figures trundling casks of brandy, bolts of sail cloth, coils of rope and a

number of small boat-anchors into the dark lane toward the lagoon. Manuel's whisper, "After them!"

He stepped into the foggy dark and stumbled at the tail of the furtive procession until the water of the lagoon gleamed dully before him.

A French voice, "Are you *monsieur* the passenger?"

"Yes."

"Into this boat quickly then!"

Stealthy oars across the water, a glimpse of the sentinel's bayonet in the fuzzy glow of a lantern, a cautious wait while his footsteps boomed across the wooden walk toward La Grève. A quick passage of the palisades beneath, just room for a boat to squeeze through. Oars again. The yellow candle-pricks of the town shut off by fog and the dark bulk of the ramparts. A grating of keels on beach stones. A swift portage of kegs and bundles to the seaward side, and the dim shapes of waiting men and boats, into one of which he was pushed. Oars again and a low calling of farewells in broken French to the vanishing figures on the shore. A long and silent row in the clammy dark, from which at long last the shape of a vessel loomed. A passing of stuff aboard, a securing of boats, a scramble over the bulwark. An immediate sense of familiarity.

Then, "Where's that hell-confounded passenger?" in a voice like no other in the world—the voice of the *Fair Lady*, the voice of Old Hux himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TALISMAN

IT WAS like a return from the dead—but after twenty years, not five. The mere existence of Halifax was a miracle after all this time. For five years his mind had been filled with memories of that cockney swarm and their bivouacs on the hillside, a cluster of lonely fires in the darkness of a continent. He remembered the "town" as a brown swordcut in the green flank of Citadel Hill, festering under the heat and flies, erupting sores of canvas and brushwood, and swarming with human maggots. It had an incredible air in those days; he expected to wake any morning and find the maggots gone, the sores vanished and the wound healed green again. Only the transports lying week after week in the harbor had any appearance of reality, and their very presence had given the whole affair a transient air, the look of a great migration at a wayside halt.

All he had heard in Louisburg of the English settlement at 'Alfax confirmed the impression of a hopeless enterprise, a clot of English exiles living a hand-to-mouth existence on the side of a hill at Chebucto, a "fortress" which had in fact no citadel, no walls, no bastions, no ditch, no magazines, nothing but a few rickety blockhouses and a rotten palisade. Many of the emigrants were still dependent entirely on the meager rations of the commissariat—after five years! Those plantations of the early plans had never come to fact. On the peninsula between Northwest Arm and Bedford Basin a scatter of small farms had been grubbed out of the rocky soil, guarded from the Indians by a blockhouse line across the neck, but their produce was a mouthful, no more. Cornwallis and the other governors had sought to tap the rich farms of the Fundy side, and for a time succeeded in tempting the avaricious Acadians with gold and silver payment. But Le Loutre had put a stop to that.

Louisburg and the French forts at the head of Fundy Bay were getting all the Acadian supplies; as if Halifax did not exist, as if Nova Scotia had never passed from the rule of France! All Canada was laughing over this pitiful English venture at Chebucto, this would-be rival to Louisburg which after five years of enormous expense remained nothing but a palisaded almshouse. But now as Roger wandered through the steep and stony streets, a lean and shabby figure in the throng of soldiers, rangers, seamen, townsmen and fishermen, he had a strange impression of permanence. He could not understand it. There was nothing to warrant it.

Sprawled over the hillside facing the harbor were seven or eight hundred houses of all sorts from the simple log hut to the one-and-a-half-story dwelling of New England, with unpainted shingles or clapboards, with dormers peering from steep-pitched roofs, and squat square chimneys of imported brick. Most of the houses stood on walls of dry field stones to keep their sills above the muck of the streets. There were still many stumps in the public thoroughfares but they were rotten now, in another year or two the traffic of heavy two-wheeled carts would grind them into the general mud. Their battered presence called attention to the barren streets, shadeless in the summer weather.

He walked to the summit. Women and youngsters were dotted over the slope picking blueberries among the stumps and boulders. Looking back on the town he noticed at once the state of the defenses. Troops still manned the five log forts which careful Mr. Bruce had built about the perimeter, and lived in barracks under the north shoulder of the hill by Grenadier Fort. But the palisade between the forts was falling down. Whole sections were gone—for firewood, probably; he could picture the cockneys after dark. The town had outgrown the thing anyway. Houses were scattered all along the harbor slope now, north and south, and settlements were creeping over the shoulders of the hill toward the west, where

an expanse of wild meadows and sedgy ponds had been set aside as a common. Beyond the common began the little farms and pastures of the German folk. Oats were ripe in their fields and he could see the flash of sickles. Goldenrod was in bloom, a deep yellow fringe along the dusty roads. It would be autumn soon.

He came upon one of Gorham's rangers sprawled with a slattern in the shade of an alder clump and spoke the question foremost in his mind.

"What's become of all the English settlers?"

The pair was none too pleased with this interruption. The ranger turned on an elbow and regarded him with a cold eye, but after inspection the fellow checked the retort twitching on his mouth and said carefully, "Go down the south slope o' the hill, mister, and foller the palisade till ye come to the south gate o' the town. It's right below Horsman's Fort. Ye'll find a lane runnin' off towards P'int Pleasant that some folk call Pleasant Street. Naow, jist aoutside the gate, on the west side o' the lane, ye'll find the English settlers—most of 'em anyhow. O' course, a lot run off Boston and New York way, or cadged a passage home."

"My thanks." As Roger turned away toward the south he heard the woman giggle.

The south gate lay on its back at the side of the road with grass growing through its weathered timbers. It had not been closed in many moons. A bored redcoat, half asleep in the sunshine, regarded Roger indifferently from the sentinel's walk outside the tumbledown log fort.

The lane with the pleasant name ran toward the south through pine woods and scattered clearings. On its west side just outside the palisade a large field climbed the slope, pimpled with low green mounds and here and there a heap of fresh-turned earth. Most of the mounds were marked with a chunk of rough fieldstone at head and foot. He cursed the ranger's humor and was about to leave when he noticed a woman sitting in the rank grass. She had a bunch of wild flowers in her hand.

He ran to her, crying, "Mrs. Killick!"

She jumped up, wide-eyed, and put out a large red hand as if to stave off a horror. "No!" she gasped. "'Tain't you! You're dead—dead five year come Michaelmas!"

"I'm Roger Sudden," he said impatiently.

She went on in a somber voice, "It all comes of 'angin' about the graveyard, just like Killick warned me. God save me, a Christian woman that never done nobody 'arm! In the broad afternoon, too!"

"Nonsense! Look here, I was carried off by the savages. And now I've come back. Look at me!"

"You always was a decent gentleman," she said timidly, after a pause. "Not one to play nasty pranks you wasn't—livin' or dead. Is it reelly you, Mr. Sudden?"

"Of course it is! Tell me, where's Killick—and my friend Tom, and Trope and Mrs. Lumley—all those people?"

She sat down rather violently on a small mound nearby and began to cry. "Oh, Mr. Sudden, sir!"

"Tell me—everything!"

"I 'ad a baby that autumn you was took, Mr. Sudden. A proper darlin'—and me childless all them years. But my little boy died, sir, in the winter, in the cruel weather." She put her head in her hands and wept without restraint. Roger waited.

AT LAST she lifted a tear-smeared face and began in a hushed voice. "We 'ad a terrible time, sir, all of us. The Injuns didn't bother us much that first autumn 'cept now and agin, like that time you got took—and Maggs and Bob and poor Will Vace that wouldn't 'urt a fly, skelped, 'ead and all so they say—God save us all, what murderin' 'eathens to be cast amongst! But it wasn't the Injuns, sir, it was the winter. That was what done for us, sir. I dunno which was the worst off—them as stayed aboard the transports all winter or them like us that lived ashore in an 'ut made o' brushwood and old sail canvas—bare earth for the floor, fire in the middle, smoke fit to choke ye, and that orful wind a-stabbin' through the walls like baggonets. There wasn't 'ardly any stoves, afloat or ashore. The food was all salt provisions, o' course, and that brought scurvy. And the water—the sojers tried to keep it clean but ye know what it was like—all that filth about the 'uts, drippin' down into the town well in the thaws. It killed us, sir. By the 'undred. Dreadful, sir. Nobody knows 'ow many died but it was close on a thousand, some say more. The Gov'nor 'ad to make regulations orderin' people to put out their dead o' mornin's, and make proper coffins, and go with the corp' to the buryin' place—this place 'ere, sir."

"But the town's grown!" protested Roger.

"Oh, so it 'as sir! After that first summer Mr. Cornwallis sent for Dutch and Swiss settlers—people that knew a bit o' farmin'. And they come by thousands—too many for a place like this. The Gov'nor sent a lot of 'em down the coast to make a town o' their own. But nearly all the farms ye see now 'tween the town and the blockhouse line was made by the furriners. Desperate poor—us London folk was rich beside 'em—but good people, a patient lot, and 'ard-workin'. But the biggest change is the New Englanders. They've come in droves o' their own accord—a thousand the fust year. They know this sort o' country—say it's like Massy-chew-sets—and don't mind the winters nor the savages. Traders and fishermen mostly—say the soil this side o' the province is sour as vinegar and ain't wuth time nor sweat—work very 'ard, talk through their noses, and

pray to Gawd in a meetin'-'ouse just like the chapel-folk at 'ome. They showed Killick 'ow to catch salmon and codfish proper-like. 'E used to sell it 'isself in the market-place but I got 'im to make me a fish-tray to carry on me 'ead so I could cry it through the streets and get a better price."

"And you're getting along all right?"

"Right as rain, sir," proudly. "Got a nice little 'ouse down by the water where the fishin'-folk live. A bit o' garden in the back and a wild-cherry tree that's white as snow come blossom-time. Killick with a boat of 'is own, too. And me"—she cast her eyes down bashfully—"expectin' again along about Christmas time."

"That's nice. And Tom—Tom Fuller?"

"Oh, 'im! Tom, 'e up and joined one o' the ranger companies—Bartelo's, I think—arter you was took, sir. They're posted up-country somewhere."

"And Trope and the Lumley woman?"

She made a mouth and a nose. "Them! Got a lodgin' 'ouse in Prince Street, down by the dissenters' meetin'-'ouse. I sell 'em a bit o' fish sometimes. They seem to do well. Very respectable lodgers, so *she* says. Clerks and such. Not like Tooley Street. But the likes o' Lumley turnin' up 'er nose!" She stood up, brushed the grass from her broad skirts, and said timidly, "I've got to get along 'ome now, sir, to get supper for my man. Would you—could you come and 'ave a bite with us, Mr. Sudden? 'Tain't much to offer a gentleman. . ."

Roger refused, promising to come some other time. There were so many things burning to be done. Nevertheless, after she had gone he remained for a time musing over the graves, seeing the pits in the snow that first winter, and the fires to thaw the ground, the watchful redcoats standing guard at the edge of the woods, and the poor human rubbish thrown into the holes, three and four deep because the soil was precious in this stony land.

He found the lodging house of Trope in Prince Street between Hollis and Granville, just above the little dissenting meeting-house, precisely as the old den in Tooley Street had stood in the morning shadow of Saint Olaves. There was something nostalgic about that. They greeted him unemotionally but the eyes of Trope and Lumley glittered with a sly curiosity. They, at least, had not changed.

Mrs. Lumley appraised his sober clothing with a fishy eye and declared, "Five shillin' a week," folding her great paws over the bulge of her apron and sniffing as if to say, "Stay or leave, if suits me."

He took it without question and climbed at her slovenly heels to just such an attic as he and Tom had shared in Tooley Street. He observed smilingly, "All it wants is Sally Madigan."

Surprisingly, the hairy creature grunted, "Well, Sal's in 'Allyfax if ye want to know. But ye wouldn't catch Sal in your attic now! She's an officer's doxy and lives in a big clapboard 'ouse in Granville Street with servants at 'er beck and call. A fine lady now, I tell ye! A major o' Lascalles' Regiment took a fancy to 'er—always a pretty slut, Sally was—and treats 'er like a queen. That's what she acts like, too." She flumped away down the stairs indignantly.

Roger stepped to the narrow gable window and peered across the ruts and stumps of Prince Street to the green rectangle of the governor's plot, where the little wooden residency stood in the heart of the town. This is the beginning, he told himself. Some day you'll hobnob over there, and they'll turn out the guard for you.

He thought then of the sealed billet in his pocket and broke the wax casually. The name in Rodrigues' spidery scrawl seemed to leap at him from the paper: *John Foy.*

THE house was an unobtrusive one in Hollis Street a few doors north of George, two stories of brown-painted shingles and a gambrel roof, with a kitchen garden at the rear enclosed in a high fence of pickets. His fingers closed on the knocker, a lion's paw of polished brass, and the echoing *rat-a-tat* made him smile. Door-knockers in Halifax! Somehow all the changes of five years seemed manifest in that.

The maidservant, Jenny, admitted him with no more emotion than the Tropes had shown, but with the same glint of curiosity. This casualness nettled him. It was as if he had not been missed for a moment of that long five years.

He stalked, hat in hand, into an elegant little parlor. A shaft of sunshine from the west window pierced it like a sword. There was a warm Turkey carpet on the floor and the walls were wainscoted in curly maple to the ceiling, with blue flock panels. The furniture was of mahogany shaped in the rather lascivious curves which his mind's eye associated with French interiors. Indeed the whole chamber had a continental look which made him wistful, for exactly what he did not know. Mary Foy? He had not lied to Wapke when he had told her of the green-eyed woman. But now that freedom blew about him like breeze in summer, he was filled once more with visions of that golden idol under the fabulous porcelain sky. He knew no more than ever where to find her but he felt quite sure his feet were on the road. He awaited impatiently the banker's step in the little hall.

Instead, with no more warning than a quick *frou-frou* of petticoats, Mary Foy swept in, wearing a sacque dress of some light muslin stuff. The loose fall of the sacque behind gave an artful dressmaker's emphasis to the taut figure in front, indeed gave her the look of a slim

figurehead springing from the full bow of a ship instead of a sacque and hoops. It belonged to her, that look. That was how he saw her always—a tall, eager figure leaning into a wind. She wore no cap. The red hair was gathered away from her forehead and from the back of her head a thick bunch of curls fell to her shoulders.

"Mr. Sudden—Roger!" she cried, coming to him with both hands outstretched. He bent over the slim strong fingers politely, aware of Foy coming into the chamber behind her. Then he was shaking Foy's hand and both were crying congratulations on his escape. Clearly Rodrigues had sent an explanatory letter by Old Hux. He was a little disappointed. He had nursed a dramatic scene in which they would be dumfounded, like poor Mrs. Killick, and he the cool adventurer. But at least they were pleased at his appearance in the flesh, and Foy called Jenny for wine and insisted on his story.

He yielded the tale reluctantly, a little resentfully. He felt suddenly the instinctive hostility of a soldier toward those who live at ease far from the battle. His phrases were curt. He shrugged off half their questions. The sunbeam crept across the room. Roger sipped his wine from time to time. Mary's stood untouched. She was watching him with wide eyes and parted lips. But Foy drank thirstily, and replenished his glass and drank and refilled with an eager clutch on the decanter, protesting jovially that, egad, this August weather parched a man. Mary glanced at him, a little mournfully Roger thought, and presently she rose with a diffident, "Well, I daresay you men have business to discuss." And from the doorway, lightly, "We'll be seeing you frequently I hope, Mr. Sudden?"

"I shall be very busy, I'm afraid, ma'am."

"Ah!" Her eyes were chilled. He rose and bowed, and she was gone.

"Now, sir," Roger said bluntly, "you've heard from Rodrigues, I think?"

Foy moved his wet lips several times before replying. "Rodigues? Yes. Yes, of course! You seem to have made an impression on my—ah—client, Sudden."

"I think I can be of profit to your client, Captain Foy—and to myself. To be quite frank, at this moment I'm thinking entirely of myself—and I want five hundred pounds at once."

Foy's brows shot up comically. "That all?"—in a sour voice.

"That will do to begin with. I want wealth, position, the amenities which make life bearable—the sort of things you enjoy for instance, Captain."

"The things that I enjoy have a rather high price, Sudden," Foy answered harshly. His snuff-dyed fingers lifted and fell in a little dance on the table edge. "I like you, Sudden, you understand. I liked you from the first, from that night you boarded the *Fair Lady* in the Thames. A gentleman and a man of action. Well! As one gentleman to another I'm happy to lend you the money you require. As a banker I must bring up the matter of collateral security."

"I have none."

Foy leaned forward. "Ah, but I have my security! I have the fact that you are Captain Roger Sudden, late of the Manchester Regiment so called in the rebellion for Charles Stuart, a refugee from England for your Jacobite sympathies—sit down, please—and now resident in a colony very much under the military government of King George."

Roger frowned. Rodrigues! And Madame Ducudrai, of course. "I see what you mean," he said.

"Good! Since we're about to become, in a sense, partners, it's just as well to have fundamental matters clear between us, Captain Sudden."

"So far you have the advantage, sir"—stiffly.

"And I intend to keep it, my dear Sudden!" Foy's smile was bland. The scar twitched in his cheek. "I shall furnish you with London drafts for five hundred pounds. Your first venture is to be in the Indian trade, I understand. That will take you away from Halifax for the autumn and winter but I shall expect you in April, say, with a full accounting. If you have done reasonably well you shall have further credits. In fact if you show diligence and enterprise I am prepared to finance anything you undertake—always providing your proposal is convincing to my own good sense."

HE PAUSED. "One or two cautions—a young man seeking his fortune cannot afford much notice in a gossipy outpost like this. Live quietly, dress thriftily, drink cautiously. Trust no one with a word of our affairs. I ask you to be discreet in all things. Henceforth you must never come to my house except at night. In the street I shall not acknowledge you, so don't speak to me. Bear in mind that I am not only the silent partner, I am the invisible partner as far as Halifax is concerned. I shall expect full and frequent accounts of your doings in the province. Keep your eyes and ears open. Information is the life of trade. One more thing—I'm absent from town at certain intervals. At such times you will render your account to my wife. She is thoroughly familiar with my affairs."

"Including this?"

"I shall acquaint her with it. I may say, Sudden, that she was delighted when we heard of your escape. She'd always hoped you were alive. Insisted, in fact! Ah, the ladies, Captain Sudden! What ever should we do without 'em?"

"What, indeed?" murmured Roger politely. He had found them a confounded nuisance. And

now, by Foy's airy breath of his own rule, that baffling green-eyed creature was to have a hand in his affairs.

He wasted no time. By first post-bag up-country went a packet containing seven guineas and a note addressed to Tom Fuller in Bartelo's company of rangers at Fort Lawrence. *Choose six good men, buy your discharge and theirs, and come to Halifax at once. . .*

He laid out his funds carefully, chiefly on rum at two shillings a gallon. He wanted a number of muskets but Mr. Thomas Saul, the great merchant of Halifax, looked down a long nose and said frigidly that the Indians were a lot of murdering devils not to be trusted with such things.

"If we don't trust 'em the French will, Mr. Saul."

But Mr. Saul's mouth was tight. He was quite sure he had no muskets. So, it seemed, were Joshua Mauger and the other merchants. Roger laid out the rest of his credits in coarse blue stroud blankets and the usual knives, hatchets, hawk-bells, beads, red cloth, looking-glasses and tinder-boxes of the Indian trade. From the dissolute Micmacs who sold lobsters on the beach he haggled and bought four large bark canoes which he overhauled himself, mending the patches and seams with tar.

On the seventh day Tom Fuller came, thin and brown in buckskins, with six men who looked exactly like him. The light in his gray eyes was the light of a happy dog's.

"S'truth, sir, I allus knowed ye'd turn up some time, and when ye did, why, orf we'd go ag'in! What is it now?"

Roger told him and watched the lift of the bold black brows.

"Ho! Peddlin' trade rum to the redskins!" He grinned. "Well, I been liftin' their scalps all this time—'twon't hurt to poison 'em for a change."

"What about these others?"

"Stake your life on 'em, sir! I picked 'em careful. Findlay and Pell was seamen once like myself, and Corcoran and Ricker and Kelligrove are woodsmen from Noo England, and the little feller Bloy that's shy his starboard ear, nobody knows where he come from, and he won't say, but I reckon there's a drop o' Mohawk in him somewheres. It took all your guineas to pay the smart-money, sir. Bartelo gits paid accordin' to the ration-stren'th o' his company, so he don't like lettin' men go for keeps."

"That's all right. How soon can we start?"

"Now, if ye say."

"Tomorrow will do. Here's another guinea—find the men lodging somwhere, and come and sleep with me at Trope's in Prince Street."

After dark Roger called at the house in Hollis Street. The stolid Jenny admitted him and after a moment Mary appeared.

"John's away," she said at once.

"Then I'll report to you, ma'am." He drew papers from his pocket and spread them on the little mahogany table. "Here's a list of my disbursements. You'll observe I had to buy some men out of the ranger corps to look after my trading post. We start in the morning."

She looked astonished. "You're as sudden as your name, aren't you?" And with a gleam of mischief she added, "One would have thought that after your long denial in the wilderness the society of our Halifax ladies . . ."

"You forget I have learned the refinements of the forest, ma'am."

"I see," she murmured, displeased. She asked a number of questions, all shrewd and to the point. When she discussed his purchases a distinct Scots accent crept out of that too-perfect English of hers and he was amused. She seemed satisfied, however, and to end the interview put out her hand briskly, as a man might. He made a leg and touched her fingers with his lips, murmuring, *"Au revoir, madame."*

She flushed a little and the green eyes were annoyed. "Until spring," she answered in English, severely.

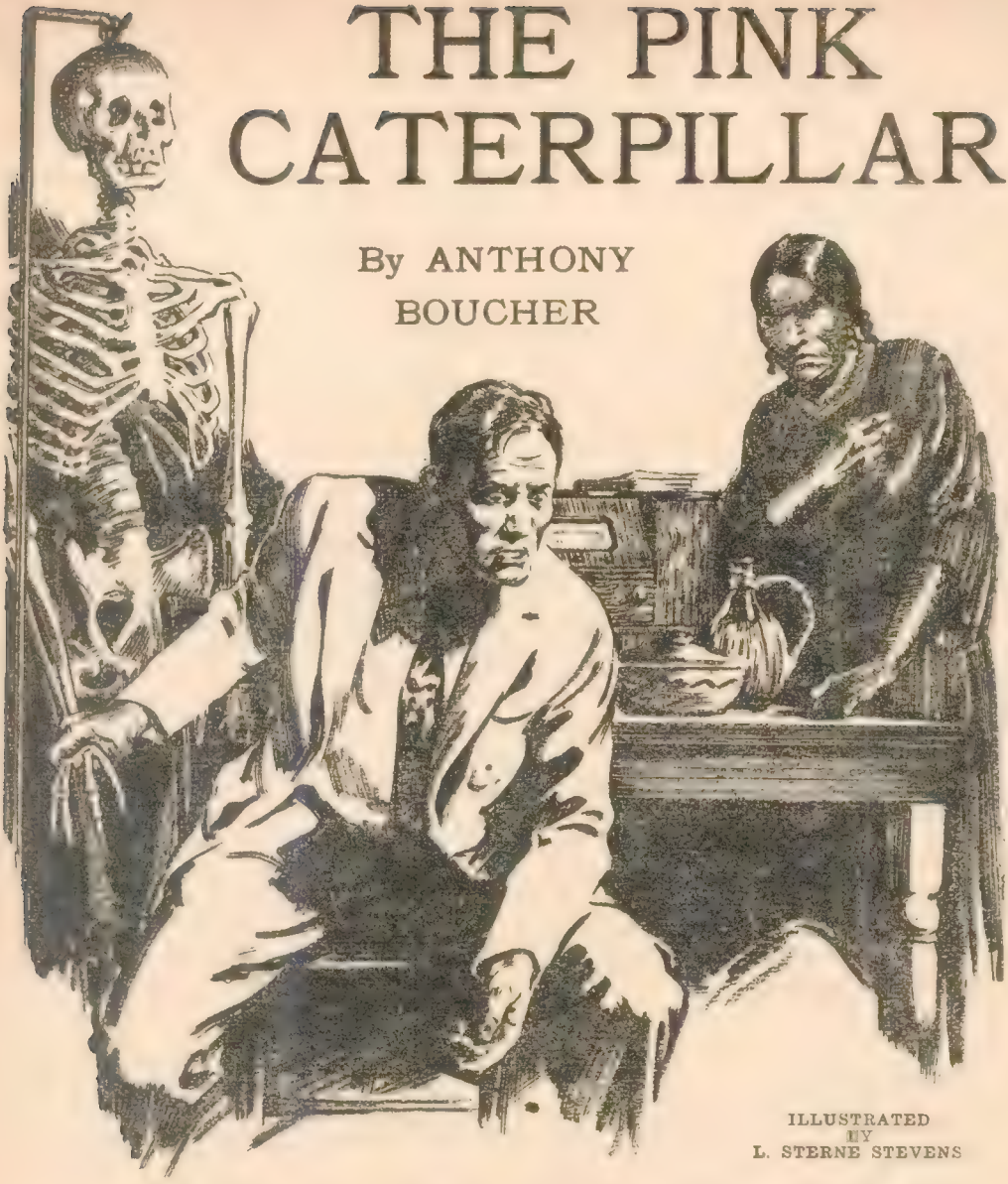
THE little expedition crossed the harbor with laden canoes in the first light and journeyed toward Fundy by the Micmac war trail of Roger's painful memory. At the first lake Roger called a halt, without explanation, and began a careful search along the shore. There was no sign of Peyal's bones in the shallows where he had seen the corpse flung. Perhaps some Indian party had found the thing, or a party of loggers from the Dartmouth sawmill. He was disappointed and baffled. Then it occurred to him that in the natural process of decay, that bloated carcass must have risen to the surface and drifted toward the outlet of the lake. He had an odd qualm at the spot where he had been kidnaped, and gripped his hatchet instinctively, as if those brown brutes might rise again from the huckleberries. But the bushes were empty and he passed on, wading slowly close to the bank, disturbing a host of frogs. He reached the rattling outpour of the lake—and there it was, sunk against the upstream side of a great boulder where it had drifted and caught. That mangled and hate-distorted flesh had rotted and sunk and dissolved, and nothing remained but the bones, furry with green pondweed—and the crude little amulet still slung against the breastbone by the thong.

He expected to find Shubenacadie well nigh deserted, and it was. The migration from the coast was still a moon away. A scatter of huham dregs, too sick, too old or too lazy to make the spring journey to the sea, spilled out of the wigwams and regarded the white men in an apprehensive silence. Gautier's cabin was

(Continued on page 145)

THE PINK CATERPILLAR

By ANTHONY BOUCHER



ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

She thought the doctor might not notice the missing finger, but he did.

NORM HARKER said. "Their medicine men can do time travel, too. At least, that's the firm belief everywhere on the island: a *tualala* can go forward in time and bring back any single item you specify, for a price. We used to spend the night watches speculating on what would be the one best thing to order."

Norman hadn't told us the name of the island. The stripe and a half on his sleeve lent him discretion; and Tokyo hadn't learned yet what secret installations the Navy had been busy with on that minute portion of the South Pacific. He couldn't talk about the installations, of course; but the island had provided him with plenty of other matters to keep us entertained, sitting up there on the Top of the Mark.

"What would you order, Tony," he asked, "with a *carte blanche* like that on the future?"

"How far future?"

"They say a *tualala* goes to one hundred years from date, no more, no less."

"Money wouldn't work," I mused. "Jewels, maybe. Or a gadget—any gadget—and you

could invent it as of now and make a fortune. But then it might depend on principles not yet worked out. . . . Or the *Gone With the Wind* of the twenty-first century—but publish it now and it could lay an egg. Can you imagine today's best sellers trying to compete with Dickens? No, it's a tricky question. What did you try?"

"We finally settled on Hitler's tombstone. Think of the admission tickets we could sell to see that!"

"And?"

"And nothing. We couldn't pay the *tualala's* price. For each article fetched through time he wanted one virgin from the neighboring island. We felt the staff somehow might not understand if we went collecting them. There's always a catch to magic," Norman concluded lightly.

Fergus O'Brien said, "Uh-huh," and nodded gravely. He hadn't been saying much all evening—just sitting there and looking out over the panorama of the Bay by night, a glistening joy, now that dimout was over, and taking in Norm's stories. I still don't know the sort of work he's been doing, but it's changing him, toning him down.

But even a toned-down Irishman can stand only so much silence, and there was obviously a story ready on his lips. Norm asked, "You've been running into magic, too?"

"Not lately." Fergus held his drink up to the light. "Damned if I know why writers always call a highball an amber liquid," he observed. "Start a cliché and it sticks. . . . Like about detectives being hard-headed realists. Didn't you ever stop to think that there's hardly another profession outside the clergy that's so apt to run up against the things beyond realism? Why do you call in a detective? Because something screwy's going on and you need an explanation. And if there isn't an explanation. . . .

"This was back a ways. Back when I didn't have anything worse to deal with than murderers, and once a werewolf. But he was a hell of a swell guy. The murderers I used to think were pretty thorough low-lifes, but now. . . . Anyway, this was back then. I was down in Mexico putting the finishing touches on a case when I heard from Dan Rafetti. I think you know him, Tony—he's an investigator for Southwest National Life Insurance, and he's thrown some business my way now and then.

"This one sounded interesting. Nothing spectacular, you understand, and probably no money to speak of. But the kind of crazy, unexplained little detail that stirs up the O'Brien curiosity. Very simple: Southwest gets a claim from a beneficiary. One of their customers died down in Mexico, and his sister wants the cash. They sent to the Mexican authorities for a report on his death and it was heart failure and that's that. Only the policy is made out to Mr. Frank Miller and the Mexican report refers to him as *Dr.* F. Miller. They ask the sister and she's certain he hadn't any right to such a title. So I happen to be right near Tlichotl, where he died, and would I please kind of nose around and see was there anything phony, like maybe an imposture. Photographs and fingerprints—from a civil service application he once made—enclosed."

"Nice businesslike beginning," Norm said.

FERGUS nodded. "That's the way it started, all very routine, yours-of-the-27th-*ult.* Prosaic-like. And Tlichotl was prosaic enough, too. Maybe to a tourist it'd be picturesque, but I'd been kicking around these Mexican mountain towns long enough so one seemed as commonplace as another. Sort of a montage of flat houses and white trousers and dogs and children and an old church and an almost-as-old *pulquería* and one that plays a hell of a guitar on Saturday nights.

"Tlichotl wasn't much different. There was a mine near it, and just out of town was a bunch of drab new frame houses for the American engineers. Everybody in town worked in the mine—all pure Indians, with those chaste profiles straight off of Aztec murals that begin to seem like the only right and normal human face when you've been among 'em long enough.

"I went to the doctor first. He was the government sanitation agent and health instructor, and the town looked like he was doing a good job. His English was better than my Spanish and he was glad I like tequila. Yes, he remembered Dr. Miller. He checked up his records, announced that Dr. M. had died on November Second. It was January when I talked to him. Simple death: heart failure. He'd had several attacks in the previous weeks, and the doctor had expected him to go any day. All of a sudden a friend he hadn't seen in years showed up in town unannounced, and the shock did it. Any little thing might have.

"The doctor wasn't a stupid man, or a careless one. I was willing to take his word that the death was natural—and maybe I ought to put in here, before your devious minds start getting ahead of me, that as far as I ever learned he was absolutely right. Common-or garden-variety of heart failure, and that didn't fit into any picture of insurance fraud. But there was still the inconsistency of the title, and I went on, 'Must've been kind of nice for you to have a colleague here to talk with?'

"The doctor frowned a little at that. It seemed he'd been sort of hurt by Dr. Miller's attitude. He'd tried to interest him in some researches he was doing with an endemic variant of undulant fever, which he'd practically succeeded in wiping out. But the North American doctor just didn't give a damn. No fraternal spirit, no scientific curiosity, nothing.

"I gathered they hadn't been very friendly,

my doctor and Dr. Miller. In fact, Miller hadn't been intimate with anybody, not even the other North Americans at the mine. He liked the Indians and they liked him, though they were a little scared of him on account of the skeleton —apparently an anatomical specimen and the first thing I'd heard of to go with his assumed doctorate. He had a good shortwave radio and he listened to music on that and sketched a little and read and went for short hikes. It sounded like a good life, if you like a lonely one. The doc thought they might know a little more about him at the *pulquería;* he stopped there for a drink sometimes. And the widow Sanchez kept house for him; she might know something.

"I tried the widow first. She wore a shapeless black dress that looked as though she'd started mourning Mr. Sanchez ten years ago, but the youngest wasn't quite walking yet. She liked her late employer, might he rest in peace. He was a good man, and so little trouble. No, he never gave medicine to anybody; that was the job of the *señor médico* from Mexico City. No, he never did anything with bottles. No, he never received much mail and surely not with money in it, for she often saw him open his few letters. But yes, indeed, he was a *médico;* did he not have the bones, the *esquéleto* to prove it?

"And if the señor interested himself so much in *el doctor* Miller, perhaps the señor would care to see his house? It was untouched, as he left it. No one lived there now. No, it was not haunted—at least, not that anyone knew, though no man knows about such things. It was only that no one new ever comes to live in Tlichotl, and an empty house stays empty.

"I looked the house over. It had two rooms and a kitchen and a tiny patio. Dr. Miller's things were undisturbed; no one had claimed them, and it was up to time and heat and insects to take care of them. There was the radio and beside it the sketching materials. One wall was a bookcase, well filled, mostly with sixteenth and seventeenth century literature in English and Spanish. The books had been faithfully read. There were a few recent volumes, mostly on travel or on Mexican Indian culture, and a few magazines. No medical books or periodicals.

"Food, cooking utensils, clothing, a pile of sketches—good enough so you'd feel all right when you'd done them and bad enough so you wouldn't feel urged to exhibit them—pipes and tobacco. These just about made up the inventory. No papers to speak of, a few personal letters, mostly from his sister (and beneficiary). No instruments or medicines of any kind. Nothing whatsoever out of the way—not even the skeleton.

"I'd heard about that twice, so I asked what had become of it. The sons of the mining engineers, the young demons, had stolen it to celebrate a gringo holiday, which I gathered had been Halloween. They had built an enormous bonfire and the skeleton had fallen in and been consumed. The doctor Miller had been very angry; he had suffered one of his attacks then, almost as bad as the one that gave him death, may the Lord hold him in his kindness. But now it was time for a mother to return and feed her brood; her house was mine, and would the señor join in her poor supper?

"The beans were good and the tortillas were wonderful; and the youngest children hadn't ever seen red hair before and had some pointed questions to ask me about mine. And in the middle of the meal something suddenly went *click* in my brain and I knew why Frank Miller had called himself doctor."

Fergus paused and beckoned to a waiter.

Norman said, "Is that all?"

"For the moment. I'm giving you boys a chance to scintillate. There you have all the factors up to that point. All right: *Why* was Miller calling himself doctor?"

"He wasn't practicing," Norman said slowly. "And he wasn't even running a fake medical racket by mail, as people have done from Mexico to avoid the U. S. Post Office Department."

"And," I added, "he hadn't assumed the title to impress people, to attain social standing, because he had nothing to do with his neighbors. And he wasn't carrying on any experiments or research for which he might have needed the title in his writings. So he gained nothing in cash or prestige. All right, what other reason is there for posing as a doctor?"

"Answer," said Fergus leisurely, "he wasn't posing as a doctor. Look: you might pose as a doctor with no props at all, thinking no one would come in your house but the housekeeper. Or you might stage an elaborate front complete with instrument cabinets and five-pound books. But you wouldn't try it with just one prop—an anatomical skeleton."

Norman and I looked at each other and nodded. It made sense. "Well, then?" I asked.

The fresh drinks came and Fergus said, "My round. . . . Well, then, the skeleton was not a prop for the medical pose. Quite the reverse. Turn it around and it makes sense. He called himself a doctor *to account for the skeleton.*"

I CHOKED on my first sip and Norman spluttered a little, too. Fergus went on eagerly, with that keen light in his green eyes, "You can't hide a skeleton in a tiny house. The housekeeper's bound to see it, and word gets around. Miller liked the Indians, and he liked peace. He had to account for the skeleton. So he became a doctor."

"But that—" Norman objected, "that's no

kind of answer. That's just another question."

"I know," said Fergus. "But that's the first big step in detection: to find the right question. And that's it: Why does a man live with a skeleton?"

We were silent for a little while. The Top of the Mark was full of glasses and smoke and uniforms; and despite the uniforms it seemed a room set aside that was not part of a world at war—still less, of a world in which a man might live with a skeleton.

"Of course you checked the obvious answer," I said at last.

Fergus nodded. "He couldn't very well have been a black magician, if that's what you mean, or white either. Not a book or a note in the whole place dealing with the subject. No wax, chalk, incense or what-have-you. The skeleton doesn't fit any more into a magical pattern than into a medical one."

"The Dead Beloved?" Norman suggested, hesitantly uttering the phrase in mocking capitals. "Rose-for-Emily stuff? A bit grisly, but not inconceivable."

"The Mexican doctor saw the skeleton. It was a man, and not a young one."

"Then he was planning an insurance fraud —burn the house down and let the bones be found while he vanished."

"*A,* You don't burn adobe. *B,* You don't let the skeleton be seen by the doctor who'll examine it later. *C,* It was a much taller man than Miller."

"A writer?" I ventured wildly. "I've sometimes thought myself a skeleton might be useful in the study—to check where to inflict skull wounds and such."

"With no typewriter, no manuscripts, and very little mail?"

Norman's face lit up. "You said he sketched. Maybe he was working on a modern *Totentanz* —dance-of-death allegory. Holbein and Dürer must have had a skeleton or two around."

"I saw his sketches. Landscapes only."

I lit my pipe and settled back. "All right. We've stooged, and we don't know. Now tell us why a man keeps house with a set of bones." My tone was lighter than necessary.

Fergus said, "I won't go into all the details of my investigations. I saw damned near every adult in Tlichotl and most of the kids. And I pieced out what I think is the answer. But you ought to be able to gather it from the evidence of four people.

"First, Jim Reilly, mining engineer. Witness deposeth and saith he was on the main street, if you can call it that, of Tlichotl on November second. He saw Dr. Miller walkings along 'like in a kind of a nervous haze.' He saw a stranger, 'swarthy but not a Mex,' walk up to Miller and say, 'Frank!' Miller looked up and was astonished. The stranger said, 'Sorry for the delay. But it took me a little time to get here.' And he hadn't finished the sentence before Miller dropped dead. Queried about stranger, witness says he gave his name as Humbert Targ. He stayed around town a few days for the funeral and then left. Said he'd known Miller a long time ago—never clear quite where, but seemingly in the South Seas, as we used to say before we learned to call it the South Pacific. Asked for description, witness proved pretty useless: medium height, medium age, dark complexion. . . . Only helpful details: stranger wore old clothes. 'Shabby?' 'No, just old.' 'Out-of-date?' 'I guess so.' 'How long ago? What kind?' 'I don't know. Just old—funny-looking.' He had only one foot. 'One leg?' 'No, two legs, just one foot.' 'Wooden peg?' 'No, just empty trouser cuff. Walked with a cane.'

"Second witness, Father Gonzaga—and it's a funny sensation talking to a priest who wears just a plain business suit. He hadn't known Dr. Miller well, though he'd said a mass for his soul. But one night Miller came from the *pulquería* to the priest's house and insisted on talking to him. He wanted to know how you could ever get right with God and yourself if you'd done someone a great wrong and there was no conceivable way you could make it up to him. The padre asked why, was the injured person dead? Miller hesitated and didn't answer. 'He's alive, then?' 'Oh, no, no!' 'Restitution could surely be made to the next of kin if it were a money matter?' 'No, it's personal.' Father's advice was to pray for the injured party's soul and for grace to avoid such temptation another time. I don't see much what else he could have suggested, but Miller wasn't satisfied."

I wasn't hearing the noise around us any more. Norman was leaning forward, too, and I saw in his eyes that he, too, was beginning to feel the essential *wrongness* of the case that the detective had stumbled on.

"Third witness, the widow Sanchez. She told me some more about the skeleton when I came back for more beans and brought a bottle of red wine to go with them, which it did magnificently. Miller had treasured his skeleton very highly. She was supposed not even to dust it. But once she forgot and dusted it, and a finger came off. This was in October. She thought he might not notice a missing finger, but she knew she'd catch it if he found a loose one; so she burned the bones in the charcoal brazier over which she fried her tortillas. Two days later she was serving the doctor his dinner when she saw a pink caterpillar crawling near his place. She'd never seen a pink caterpillar before. She flicked it away with a napkin, but not before the doctor saw it. He jumped up from the table and ran to look at the skeleton and gave her a terrific bawling-out. After that she saw the caterpillar several times. It was about then that Miller started having these heart attacks. Whenever

she saw the caterpillar it was crawling toward the doctor. I looked at her a long time while she finished the wine, and then I said, 'Was it a caterpillar?' She crossed herself and said, 'No.' She said it very softly and that was all she said that night."

I looked down at the table. My hand lay there and the index finger was tapping gently. We sat in quite a draft, and I shuddered.

"Fourth witness, Timmy Reilly, twelve-year-old son of Jim. He thought it was a great lark that they'd stolen the old boy's bones for Halloween. Fun and games. 'These dopes down here didn't know from nothin' about Halloween but him and the gang, they sure showed 'em.' But I could see he was holding something back. I made a swap. He could wear my detective badge (which I've never worn yet) for a whole day if he'd tell me what else he knew. So he showed it to me: the foot that he'd rescued when the skeleton was burned up. He'd tried to grab the bones as they toppled over and all he could reach was the heel. He had the whole foot, well-articulated and lousy with tarsals and stuff. So I made a better deal: he could have the badge for keeps—with the number scratched out a little—if he'd let me burn the foot. He let me."

Fergus paused, and it all began to click into place. The pattern was clear, and it was a pattern that should not be.

"YOU'VE got it now?" Fergus said quietly. "All I needed to make it perfect was Norm's story. There had to be such things as *tualalas*, with such powers as theirs. I'd deduced them, but it's satisfying to have them confirmed.

"Miller had an enemy, many years ago—a man who had sworn to kill him. And Miller knew a *tualala*, back there in the South Seas. And when he asked himself what would be the best single item to bring back from the future,

"It wasn't murder. He probably had scruples about that. He sounded like a good enough he knew the answer: *his enemy's skeleton.* guy in a way, and maybe his *tualala* asked a more possible price than Norm's. The skeleton was the skeleton that would exist naturally a hundred years from now, no matter how or when the enemy died. But bring that skeleton back here, and the enemy can no longer exist. His skeleton can't be two places at once. You've got the dry dead bones. What becomes of the live ones with flesh on them? You don't know. You don't care. You're safe. You're free to lead the peaceful life you want with Indians and mountain scenery and your sketch pad and your radio. And your skeleton.

"You've got to be careful of that skeleton. If it ceases to exist in this time, the full-fleshed living skeleton might return. You mustn't ever take a chance on the destruction of a little piece. You lose a finger, and a finger returns—a pink thing that crawls, and always toward you.

"Then the skeleton itself is destroyed—all but one foot. You're in mortal terror, but nothing happens. Two days go by, and it's November second. You know what the second of November is like in Latin America? It's All Souls Day in the churches, and they call it the *Día de los difuntos*—the Day of the Dead. But it isn't a sad day, outside of church. You go to the cemetery, and it's a picnic. There are skeletons everywhere, same as Halloween—bright, funny skeletons that never hurt anybody. And there are skulls to wear and skulls to drink out of, and bright white sugar skulls with pink and green trimmings to eat. All along every street are vendors with skulls and skeletons for every purpose, and every kid you see has a sugar skull to suck. Then at night you go to the theater to see *Don Juan Tenorio*, in which the graves open and the skeletons dance, while back home the kids are howling themselves to sleep because skulls are so indigestible.

"Of course, there's no theater in Tlichotl, but you can bet there'd be skulls and skeletons, some of them dressed up like Indian gods for the Christian feast, some of them dancing on wires, some of them vanishing down small gullets. And there you are in the midst of skeletons, skeletons everywhere, and your skeleton is gone and all your safety with it. And there on the street with all the skulls dipping and bowing at you, you see him and he isn't a skull any more. He's Humbert Targ, only with just one foot, and he's explaining that it took a little time to get here.

"Wouldn't you drop dead?" Fergus concluded simply.

My throat felt dry as I asked, "What did you tell the insurance company?"

"Much like Norm's theory. Man was an artist, had an anatomical model, gave out he was a doctor to keep the natives from conniption fits. The prints they sent me fitted what I found in his home and they had to pay the sister. Collected expenses but no bonus."

Norman cleared his throat. "I'm beginning to hope they don't send me back to the island."

"Afraid you might get too tempted by a *tualala?*"

"No. But on the island we really do have pink caterpillars. I'm not sure I could face them."

"There's one thing I still wonder," Fergus said reflectively. "Where was Humbert Targ while his skeleton hung at Miller's side? Or should I say *when* was he? He said, 'It took a little time to get here.' From where? From when? And what kind of time?"

There are some questions you don't even try to answer.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

WÁCHEE!

Query:—I am a writer whose needs are in connection with an attempt to do some magazine fiction set in the "fur country" of Northern Canada—about which I have some working knowledge, though not always enough to meet adequately certain little details which come up from time to time asking for authentic handling. The character types at present being used are: Ojibway Indians of Canada, Wood Crees, French-Ojibway *métis*, French-Canadians, Royal Canadian Mounted Police—which, at the period when these stories are laid, I think were called Royal *Northwest* Mounted Police. This, I believe, will give a general idea of what the queries are driving at.

1. My especial need at this time is for (a) a few Cree proper names, masculine and feminine, and their meaning or equivalent in English, if that's possible. Say two or three of each, so that I may choose for euphony—and I'd be glad if they were not too long, or too difficult for the reader (if any) to pronounce. (b) A Cree greeting, filling the bill for an English "Good evening," or "How do you do?" or the French-Canadian "*B'jou'*." (c) Cree "Thank you." (d) the Cree word, if any, for Frenchman.
2. Perhaps you could suggest some book of general information (not a history) about the Crees? If there's such which includes something in the way of a Cree-English vocabulary—so much the better.
3. (a) Are Crees identical with Algonquins?
   (b) Are Ojibways identical with Chippewas? (c) Are the Cree and Ojibway dialects similar enough so that each of these tribes could understand the other's speech? (d) Does "Cree country" extend as far east, say, as James Bay?
4. Where is Stony Mountain Penitentiary?
5. Can you suggest some Canadian trail-outfitting concern that publishes (in these times) a descriptive, illustrated catalogue of the kind of stuff that would be used by these fellows I have mentioned and asked questions about? I wrote Hudson's Bay Company at Winnipeg asking if they had one, and if so, whether I could obtain a copy. I had a most courteous reply from Mr. R. C. Ingram, of the Merchandise Depot, Fur Trade Department, advising me that Hudson's Bay Company did not publish such a book. Possibly there's some such establishment in Montreal or Quebec.

--W. E. Knibloe
38 Park St.,
Buffalo, N. Y

Reply by H. S. M. Kemp:—You don't enquire definitely, but I may tell you that the North-West Mounted Police was formed in 1873, became the Royal North-West Mounted Police on June 24, 1904, and in November, 1919, the Government passed an act embodying the Dominion Police with the R.N.W.M.P. and gave the new set-up the title of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Effect was given to this legislation by Order in Council in February, 1920, and the headquarters of the Force was moved to Ottawa. This, so that you will get your titles and dates correctly. Now to your specific questions:

1. (a) The Woods Crees don't go in for "names" as we understand them, i.e., John Smith or Bill Jones, but tag themselves Nekik the Otter or Muskwa the Bear. Or names may be the outcome of some physical characteristic. Hence I got "Oopowanasis", the Starved One— account of being one of Pharaoh's lean kine; and a man I knew drew "Ooopemachisk," Crooked Stern, because of a physical deformity that made him swing that part of his anatomy to starboard as he walked. But for your purpose, you'd better stay with the nouns; and I give you a few:—

   Male: Sákwāsew, the Mink; Séekoos, the Weasel; Wápoose, the Rabbit; Múhegun, the Wolf; Míkisew, the Eagle; Ahtik, the Cariboo.

   Female: Wápisew, the Swan; Ohoosis, the Owl (Little One); Pepékesis, the Sparrow Hawk; Sowúnahun, the South Wind, Wuskwā, the Birch, Neépeesee, the Willow, and if these aren't enough, ask for more.

   (b) The Cree greeting is "Wáchee!" This is a corruption of "What Cheer!" and was doubtless picked up from the sailors on the Hudson's Bay ships coming into Hudson's Bay.

   (c) Similarly, the Cree "Thank you" is a corruption—"Tán-e-kee!" They have no corresponding term in their own language,

(Continued on page 144)

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *Paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting, Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 918 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trails—ROY S. TINNEY, care of *Adventure.*

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *Airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESEBERG, care of *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

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Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edward High School, Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Marine Corps—LIEUT. COL. F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Navy—LIEUTENANT DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—GORDON MACGREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

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Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

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Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.* **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

From the teeming jungles of Central America, where both vine and venomous serpent have writhed their way in to take over the templed remnants of a once glorious civilization—to the steaming Formosan camphor camps where Chinese and Korean slave labor tap the giant trees for the precious juice that means so much to the Jap war machine—and half around the world again to the continent down under where Yank and Aussie mingle in the streets of Melbourne. It's a "Grand Tour" *Adventure* takes you on next month to a dozen far-flung action-fiction fronts.

"THE GREAT STONE GODS"

By JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

and

"LOST FACE"

A "Koropok" Story

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

are the two long novelettes we feature. Mr. Rogers hasn't been with us since "Drum Patrols" appeared back in September 1940—too long a time to be absent—and we can't imagine a happier way to have him return than with this fabulous and gripping off-trail story of a Central American dictator who anticipated Hitler—but not quite in the manner you may think.

And Mr. Small's counterfeit Ainu, Lieutenant Llewellyn Davies, USN, still waging his one-man war in the heart of Japland, gets himself shipped to the colonies in chains in time to hear American B-29's roar overhead on their initial errands of destruction.

Plus an unusual short story by Jim Kjelgaard—"Pigeoner"—which takes you back to the days when the beat of the wings of a myriad million passenger birds was being steadily and inevitably silenced for all time by the professional slaughterer . . . "Scratch One Red Squirrel"—a gripping tale of a naval air gunner who couldn't get over the bad habit he'd had as a sportsman and skeet shooter in civilian life when he began to substitute Jap planes for clay birds. It's by Stuart D. Ludlum who told us about "The Tired Old Bag of Buka." . . . Robert H. Wall, Jr. gives us "Get Off My Back"—a hilarious episode in the life of a Yank GI in Australia and in the lives of several gals he didn't marry in the land of the duck-billed platypus. . . . And Jack Murray lets us listen to the bark of "Florida's Flaming Six-Guns" in a thrilling true account of the Taylor County Cattle War that rivaled anything the wildest Wild West of the palmiest days of Texas ever had to offer. . . . Together with the next gripping installment of Thomas H. Radall's "Roger Sudden" which launches that uneasy mortal on the seas of colonial power politics and war to the death. . . . As well as many additional short stories of quality, fact features and departments such as you can expect to find any month but not in any magazine except—

On Sale February 9th

(Continued from page 8)

Dear Sir:

I have been a constant reader of *Adventure* for many years and have always admired it for its scientific and technical accuracy, but Stuart D. Ludlum's story, "The Tired Old Bag of Buka" in the October 1944 issue is so full of inaccuracies and impossibilities that I could not refrain from writing to you.

For the first instance, Mr. Ludlum has his central character use a small steel mirror to flash messages to the carrier. Now, sending messages by sun flashes, or by heliograph to be exact, is not so simple as that. To begin with, both sending and receiving stations must be on a fairly stable foundation which assuredly the deck of an aircraft carrier and the basket of a free balloon are not. Then the sun's rays must be accurately directed to the receiving station which cannot be done with a mirror held in the hand. The usual heliograph machine is an intricate instrument, to describe it would take up too much space in a letter, sufficient to say that it takes an experienced hand to adjust same and send messages with any degree of satisfaction. The chance of even hitting the carrier once with a mirror held in the hand is very remote and to send messages such as are given in the story is an utter impossibility from a free balloon basket. As for sending a message from a rubber life-raft on the surface of the heaving sea—well, let's just forget the whole thing, anyway. (Where did that guy get that second mirror anyway?) If Lt. Ludlum had let them use flashlights he would have been correct as the beam from a flashlight can be seen for a long way even in daylight.

Now about pigeons. To begin with, Margo was not a carrier pigeon. She was a Homing Pigeon, usually called Homers or Racing Homers. Pigeons won't fly at night as Margo proved. They will only fly back to the place where they were born or raised. They won't fly over water because they must have landmarks to fly by. That is one reason they won't fly at night, they can't see where they are going. If Margo was released near the island and had a choice between the carrier and dry land, I assure you she would pick the dry land. Homing pigeons have to go through an extensive course of training to even learn to fly back to the home where they were born and raised, so that it is an absurdity to think that Margo would fly from an island at night and pick out a carrier from among a bunch of ships at sea. Many racing birds are lost on training flights from as short a distance as five miles from home.

Mike must have been "Iron Mike" indeed when that ammo dump went up. As the author says, "it must have laid every living thing on that atoll flatter than a flight deck."

I hope Lt. Ludlum's book on the "Yorktown" sticks closer to facts than his story did.

We hastened the above off to Author Ludlum—back in civilian clothes once again since the story appeared—for rebuttal purposes. Here's what he "rebutts"—

First, the flashing. It is possible to flash messages from unstable "platforms" with mirrors when the sun is not at too sharp an angle from the receiver. If such sending is impossible I know several survivors who are mighty glad they did not know it when they were sending distress signals. Fortunately, the rescuers didn't realize it couldn't be done either.

Now—pigeons. The Pigeon Expert of the Museum of Natural History has added his endorsement to the "impossible" feats that are being done in the air as well as on paper.

First, Margo was a Homer. You're correct. However, the public still thinks of carrier pigeons as pigeons that carry messages even though pigeon fanciers call them Homers . . . and call a show bird a Carrier. Paper shortage prevented complete clarification on this point. After all, a lot of people who should know better still call airplanes "ships" . . . yet no one cringes, except an admiral or two.

The Army has taught pigeons to carry messages at night, without startling success, however. Also, pigeons can be trained to home to a ship. Perhaps the availability of an island would confuse Margo's purpose. However, when she was finally released, the island was out of sight and the carrier was visible. It's no trick to train a pigeon to return to a ship it can see.

Once again, the paper shortage prevented us from explaining how Margo had been taken off an airplane and taught to return to the carrier. If you still insist that it can't be done, there are a lot of pigeons in the Pacific that should get "the word" because they've definitely been taken advantage of. (Pigeons and prepositions . . . we have to live with them . . . so why worry about them too much?)

Now for Mike. He started the blast on the island; so of course he was flat—behind something substantial, too—before the big boom.

As for the *Yorktown* book. That's fact—not fiction.

Sincerely,
Stuart D. Ludlum
(No longer Lieutenant . . . My God! Maybe you've discovered why the Navy doesn't need me me anymore.)

We'll keep you posted on the publication of the *Yorktown* book. We've read portions of the manuscript and hope to have an opportunity to see the rest. It's a fine job.

AND speaking of books—every once in a while we like to let you know what *Adventure* authors have been doing for the book publishers, remind you that much

material which has appeared in these pages also finds its way between book covers, as well as considerable work by authors whose names have become familiar to you on our contents page but which, for some reason or other, we have not been able to include in our magazine. For instance—

Hugh B. Cave has two fine books about the Navy—"We Build, We Fight!" (Harper $2.50) and "The Fightin'est Ship" (Dodd, Mead $2.50). The first is the story of the Seabees, those "Can Do" boys who have become the miracle men of this war; the second, on which Lt. C. G. Morris, USNR collaborated with Mr. Cave, is the thrilling story of the cruiser *Helena*, which sank in Kula Gulf in July '43 after sinking four Jap ships. Both books are lavishly illustrated with official Navy photographs. . . . Carl D. Lane's "American Paddle Steamboats" (Coward-McCann $6.00) is the authoritative work on these rapidly vanishing craft of another era. It's the complete story of the stern and sidewheeler, crammed with history and lore, and contains a hundred or more plates and plans of all the various types of paddle steamboats. . . . Arthur H. Carhart, of our *Ask Adventure* staff, has written "The Outdoorsman's Cookbook" (Macmillan $1.95), as practical a guide to good grub on the trail as we've ever seen, with recipes for everything from armadillo sausage to roast woodchuck. . . . Fairfax Downey's "Jezebel the Jeep" (Dodd, Mead $2.00) we published in these pages. Paul Brown has done a new set of illustrations you'll enjoy comparing with our Charles Dye's. . . . M. V. Heberden's "To What Dread End" (Doubleday, Doran's Crime Club $2.00) is an ingeniously plotted murder mystery set in wartime England. . . . F. R. Buckley's "Davy Jones, I Love You" (Lippincott, $2.50) with illustrations by the author, is his extremely amusing account of his voyage in convoy to England last year. We published an excerpt from it—"Watch Below"—a few months ago.

YOU will recall a letter in this department in the November issue from Lloyd Emerson Siberell chiding Author James Vale Downie for the ferocity he permitted a brace of bloodhounds to display in his tale "Bells of Breakbone" which we printed some months ago. Bloodhounds, Mr. Siberell claimed, are never vicious. Author Downie countered by saying that any breed of dog could be trained to bite and insisted that the hounds he wrote about had been instructed to chew their quarry to pieces. We passed both Mr. Siberell's letter and Author Downie's along to Freeman Lloyd for adjudication and here's what our *Ask Adventure* dog expert writes—

Regarding the temperament of the pure bloodhound breed, it all depends on the manner in which the individual hound has been trained. He may be broken as an ordinary trailer or as a runner on the scent of a fugitive, an attacker, and killer. I have observed two such bloodhounds in action, on the trail of an Italian who had stabbed a man in Poughkeepsie, New York, where I was a guest of the sheriff, who had an English pure-bred dog bloodhound and an American-bred bloodhound bitch with a dash of American foxhound blood in her veins. The former had been trained to run on the line of a human but not to attack. When this dog (whose name was Moses) got up to his quarry he simply held up and bayed the fugitive. On the other hand, the bitch would run in, bite and maul the unfortunate person.

The bitch—a very devil—had been trained in a prison in the South, the sheriff said, where in order to make the dogs savage and hateful toward Negroes, the colored prisoners were ordered to kick at the palings of the hounds' kennel yards and otherwise tease and annoy the inmates. The English hound had not been encouraged in such way—hence he lacked the savagery of the Southern jail-trained bitch.

As protectors of white men or officials in the Negro compounds on gold fields in Johannesburg, South Africa, in the middle '90's of the last century, German boarhounds or Great Danes, were employed. The natives were of the "raw" description and had been herded like sheep and conveyed up to the Rand or Reef in cattle trucks, They had been "leased" by their chiefs; and my friend, the late Bob Cochrane, a compound manager, had 4,000 boys in his corrugated iron-fenced enclosures. The Company had provided six thoroughly - trained - in - Germany boarhounds, broken to remain at heel until a sign—such as a single shrugging of a shoulder—apprised them of danger ahead. Two of these dogs always strode at the manager's side; the others were left at our friend's cottage outside the compound, to stand guard over his wife and child. The agility and power of these boarhounds was beyond praise; and this I was to witness under exciting conditions.

One Sunday morning, while out on the veld, and examining the conditions of some mules just taken up from the depths of the mine, three excited and Portugese-spirits-drunk natives, each carrying and holding aloft two fighting sticks, ran toward us, crying "Bob! Bob! Bob!" in a menacing way.

"Now you'll see how Flora and Old Bess work," quietly observed the imperturable Robert. Then up went his right shoulder, and Flora leaped forward; then the left shoulder, and Old Bess followed suit. Each took her victim by his naked thigh, threw him to the ground, and, standing astride over the body, stood ready to make the throat thrust. The third boy had taken to his heels.

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27 W. Clinton Ave., Dept. 22, P. O. Audubon, N. J.

Flora and Old Bess had saved our lives. Bob never carried a firearm, but his kafir policemen were provided with knobkerries and assegais. The *big baas* depended on his dogs.

I trust the foregoing will help clear up the controversy.

THE four big steel cabinets in the *Adventure* office, containing the file cards which cross-index by title and author every item which has appeared on our contents page since Volume I, Number 1, form, we like to feel, a mighty complete repository of information for checking purposes. Once in a while, however, we get a request to spot the issue in which some item appeared and to our dismay are unable to find it. Our *Camp-Fire* and other back-of-the-book departments, which often carried bits of verse and short article features, have never, we regret, been properly indexed. This would be a mammoth task—maybe something to tackle as a post-war activity when personnel is more available than now—but in the meantime, we find ourselves stumped on occasion. Then there's nothing to do but ask for help from some old-time reader with a long memory who happens to be sitting in on a *Camp-Fire* session. For instance—

John Wilstach of Rhinebeck, N. Y. writes—

> Once I cut out a poem from *Adventure* (and lost copy) worth reprinting. Believe it was by a guy named Gleason and was about a sailor who endured all sorts of brutal treatment from a mate and waited till the voyage was over and they were on the dock when: "I knocked him down in his own tobacco juice." For some reason or other this seemed a priceless line to me. Will you please look up this poem (it's not long) and reprint, say in *Camp-Fire*? I want a copy and those who never saw it would enjoy it.

Can anybody help us spot the verse for Mr. Wilstach?

And James Terry of Poplar, Montana, asks—

> Please locate a poem which appeared in *Adventure*, I believe somewhere between 1910 and 1918, entitled "The Roaring Three." It concerned a trio of naval bums on the roam—a Negro, a white man and a Chinaman. Part of it goes, "And one was black and one was white and one he was Chinee—And the roaringest and rowdiest were named the roaring three."

The verse just isn't indexed under any such title. Again, can anybody come to the rescue?

Mrs. T. W. Barker of Piqua, Ohio insists that twenty or more years ago we printed a poem titled "The Adventurer" (author forgotten) which began—

> When Adam beat a swift retreat
> From Eden's sunny strands,
> And with his wife, took up his life
> Within some foreign lands,
> If you could trace his resting place
> To dreary climes or fair,
> I'll bet a drink, you'd find a Chink,
> John Chinaman was there.

She says it went on mentioning spots in history and over the globe and wound up, "Yes, for John is ever here," no matter how dangerous or wild or mild or far, "You'll find a patient, calm Chinese." The true adventurer if there ever was one.

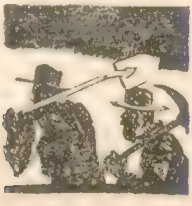
Well, when we went to look that one up we discovered that we'd printed no less than six different verses called "The Adventurer" by six different authors—but not one of them contained a word about a Chinese!

Can anybody help the lady? Or Mrs. William R. Carlson of Worcester, Mass. who writes

> Sometime between 1927 and 1930, I think, I read a serial in *Adventure* about Eric the Red, Leif and their folks. It dealt with their hardships and tribulations and their settling in Iceland. Can you tell me the author, whether it's published in book form and who published it? I haven't any idea what the title was.

We're sorry but we haven't either and the description is too slim to give any real clue. Can anyone spot this story?

And Richard J. Cox of North Little Rock, Ark. wants to trace an article which described the shooting of one Fred Chilton, a Western gunfighter, by Punch Mouth Stanton or the Catfish Kid at the town well in Tascosa, Texas at the time of the Lincoln County cattle war. He says we printed it thirteen to eighteen years ago but without the title or author's name—neither of which can Mr. Cox recall—we can't track it down for him. How about a little help—some of you old-timers with long memories in the Readers' Brigade?—K.S.W.



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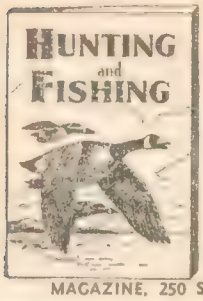

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(Continued from page 136)

but if a man is overwhelmed by the kindness of another he might say "Ke nanaskómitin"—"I am indeed grateful to you."

(d) Words and meaning change with localities. "Wemistikósew" was the generally accepted word for a Frenchman, but hereabouts the word is used to signify any white man, with "Pakwayis" being the Frenchman. "Móoneas" (a corruption of the French pronunciation of "Montreal") is purely a word to denote a "Montrealer" or a man from the outside; but nowadays it is generally given to a greenhorn. For your purposes, and if your stories are laid north of the Great Lakes or west, I'd call a Frenchman a Pákwayis, any white man a Wemistikósew, and a tenderfoot a Moóneas.

To aid you in your pronunciation, I have shown the "a" as in "pay" thus: ā. All the other "a"s are broad, as in "far". Therefore, Pakwayis would be pronounced "Pah-kwah-yis" with the accent, as shown on the "Pah."

2. I don't know any book of general information regarding the Crees. Possibly because of personal contact with them I never felt the need of one. But if you want to soak yourself in Indian atmosphere and the Indian mind, get and read Stewart Edward White's "Silent Places." This mainly concerns the Ojibway, but I think it's the sort of thing you need.

The rest of the information I have for you is not guaranteed. Y'see, I'm a North Saskatchewan man, and information regarding other Indians than Crees and country beyond the limits of Saskatchewan is not quite in my line. But here it is, and it should be mainly true:

3. (a) You ask if Crees are identical with Algonquins. To-day, Algonquin represents a family, or a group, more than a particular tribe. It takes in the Crees, the Ojibways, the Swampy Crees, and, I think, the Stoneys and the Blackfoot. So a Cree is an Algonquin as much as a New Yorker is an American.

(b) Call 'em Ojibways or Chippewas; they're all the same.

(c) I talk Cree, but not Ojibway; yet reading Ojibway words, I understand most of them. The main difference seems to be in the consonants: the Ojibway is heavy, the Cree sibilant. Thus Longfellow's "Gitchee Gummee" for the Sea becomes "Keche Kummi" in Cree and "Cheemong" for Canoe becomes "Cheeman." Certainly a Cree and an Ojibway should not be tonguetied in each other's company.

(d) As I understand it, Cree country extends right to James Bay. On the map, I notice that Ojibway names from the south die out there and Cree becomes the vogue.

4. Stony Mountain Penitentiary, or at least the town, is thirteen miles north of Winnipeg, and served by the C.P.R.

5. Regarding that trail-outfitting concern, write to the Woods Manufacturing Co., Ltd., Ottawa, Ont.

(Continued from page 130)

empty. The door swung wide in the wind along the river and there was a drift of last fall's leaves in the corners. The trader had not been here since last summer, then. Why?

He walked the length of the camp and found the wigwams for the most part in a state of disuse. He peered into the lodge where he had been a prisoner and was astounded to see the old woman squatting there silent and alone, as if she had waited all this time for his return.

"*Kway!*" he said.

"O Man," she answered in a dry, rustling voice, "I cannot see thee, for my eyes are dead, but thy voice is the voice of Bosoley."

"I am Bosoley, mother. Where are the people?"

"Thou know where the people go in summer," she answered evasively.

"They did not winter here. Think thou I am blind, like thee?"

She rose and put out a withered claw, fumbling slowly at his breast. When her fingers passed over the amulet she uttered in a small squeak, "*Ehhhhh!*"

"How did thee know?" he asked.

"Thou came, and only the power of the totem could have brought thee back. It belongs to the Meeg-a-maage, Bosoley. The little fish cries out to be restored to them."

"Perhaps the little fish will tell me where the people are," he taunted.

Her eyes, those dead discs, stared at him horribly. "The women and children have gone towards Oonamaagik, to the great town of the Wenjoo there. The warriors gather with The Otter at the end of the Great Bay."

"At Beauséjour?"

"That is the Wenjoo name."

"The Otter has gathered them for Jesus-talk, perhaps?"

"For war. War is in the wind."

"What wind, mother?"

"The springtime wind, which blows from the southwest, from Bostoon."

He put a stick of trade tobacco in her hand and left her mumbling of a forest turned red before its time.

(End of Part III)

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Anyone knowing the whereabout of John S. Peebles, Jr. please write J. S. Peebles, White Cloud, Michigan, RFD#2. His parents have considered him dead but have lately heard that he is still alive and they have been unable to obtain his address.

Bill Arenz, who left Jacksonville, Ill. in 1940. I am married to your daughter, Helen, and would like to meet or hear from you. E. D. Meany, 407 Highland Ave., Palisade Park, N. J.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Joe, Lonnie or Sam Standley, last heard of at Round Rock, Texas, or of John, Dave, Willie or Jim Hall, farmers, last heard of at Vanatlyne, Texas 50 years ago, please contact Arthur Callaham, Idabel, Okla.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Herbert A. Roig—forty-three years old, five feet ten inches tall, weighs a hundred and fifty pounds, gray eyes, brown hair, last heard of in 1939 in Houston, Texas—please communicate with his friend Frank Landon, 1146 Webster St., San Francisco 15, Calif.

Louis Sixt, probably known as Bob Six, last heard of in Gananoque, Ont. and Vancouver, B. C. Age about 26, height 4 ft. 10 in., weight 135 lbs., gray eyes, back-brushed straight brown hair. Scrapper, gambler, seafaring man. Anyone having knowledge of his whereabouts write his brother Paul Sixt, c/o *Adventure*.

"Captain" Wood Briggs was last heard of in 1924 when he was a lecturer on the Elliott White Chautaqua Circuit. He lived then at 6205 Geary St., San Francisco, Calif. Anyone knowing his present whereabouts please write Jack Bowman, P. O. Box 431, Little Rock, Ark.

Would like to hear from Bill Daly from El Paso, Texas. He is a salesman of automobiles and automobile parts. Very important. J. L. Hobson, 633½ West 85 St., Los Angeles 44, Calif.

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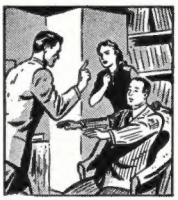

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